

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

Research by “Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk” (1996) shows the number of children leaving state care in South Africa that end up in prison to be unreasonably high. Also, the Department of Social Welfare (1977) has pleaded since 1975 for research on the experiences of the child leaving children’s homes. In 1997, the Department of Social Welfare (White Paper, 1997) also stressed the necessity of appropriate strategies to support the state care leaver being discharged from the children’s home after the age of 18. Psychologists are concerned with seeking, understanding and finding solutions for societal issues affecting the development of the people of this country.

This study therefore dealt with analysing the problems, as well as positive influences experienced by school leavers from state care over the age of 18 years. Some of the most common experiences of these young people leaving state care were feelings of stigmatisation (discrimination), feelings of loneliness, lack of knowledge in various psychological and social areas, lack of skills for independent living, lack of career knowledge and career exposure, and lack of social support and of trust.

The transitional phase from adolescence to young adulthood is a difficult one for all young adults in this phase of life. As the state care leaver does not have the support systems that an average child from a family home has, it is important to know if theory, assisting the psychologist and other social health practitioners, is adequate in the knowledge and understanding of this specific subculture of young people in the South African society.

Although most of the participants were already young adults at the time of the interviews, their reflections were of their late adolescent experiences.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and the Rationale for the Study

According to Martin and Jackson (2002), published research on the phenomenological experience of state care leavers was non-existent before 1987. Later, solely looking at the field of phenomenological experience of state care leavers, a book on a study in Ireland (Kelleher, Kelleher & Corbett, 2000), autobiographies (e.g. Hewitt, 2002), and single experiences of individuals in reports about the “Care Leavers Act of 2000” of Great Britain (Frampton, 2002; Osborne, 2002, 2003; Paxton, 2002; Smith, Coleman & Bull, 2002) emerged.

An active line of research concentrated after 1990 mostly on children’s home models (Ajayi & Quigley, 2006; Epprecht, et al., 2001), social policy, programme evaluations (Munroe, Stein & Ward, 2005), outcome studies and surveys (Wade & Dixon, 2006), or on the experiences of the state care leaver for educational purposes (Hukkanen, Sourander, Bergroth & Piha, 1999; Jackson, Ajayi & Quigley, 2003, 2005; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Stein, 1994).

Additionally – and more relevant to this study - are the most recent works on state care leavers done by Courtney (e.g. Courtney, Piliavan, Grogan-Kayor & Nesmith, 2001; Courtney & Hughes, 2003; Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Havlicek & Bost, 2005), Jackson (e.g. Jackson & Simon, 2006; Jackson, et al., 2003, 2005), Stein (e.g. Clayden & Stein, 2005; Stein, 2005; Stein, 2006), and Wade (e.g. Wade & Dixon, 2006; Wade, Mitchell & Baylis, 2005). All of these studies or books, however, focused on social work as a field. Although Courtney concentrates a little more on the development into adulthood, he mainly concentrates on children from foster care (Courtney & Hughes, 2003; Courtney, et. al., 2001; Courtney, et. al., 2005). However, there are other authors that touch on the subject to give weight to their arguments (Stein, 2004; Stein, 2005; Yates, 2001).

Studies up to now on the state care leaver were mainly done in Scotland (Dixon & Stein, 2005), England (Hai & Williams, 2004), Ireland (Kelleher, et al., 2000), Northern Ireland (Pinkerton & McCrea, 1999), Europe, Israel,

Canada and the United States (Bilson, Armstrong, Buist, Caulfield-Dow & Lindsay, 2000; Munroe, Stein & Ward, 2005), as well as Australia and New Zealand (Ward, 2000; and Yates, 2001). All the work so far has thus concentrated on developed countries and no countries that have developing communities, such as South Africa, has been considered.

Hayes (2002, p. 18), from Great Britain, motivated the need for this kind of research by saying that the "...fact that change was needed, is supported by statistics. Care leavers are more likely to leave school with no qualifications, be unemployed, suffer mental health problems, fall into homelessness, serve a prison sentence and be a teenage parent". This statement is supported by statistical data of psychological problems in children from children's home provided by Pearce (2002). This negative adult outcome of state care leavers seems to be an international phenomenon (Biehal, Clayden, Stein & Wade, 1995; Bilson, Armstrong, Buist, Caulfield-Dow & Lindsay, 2000; Kelleher, Kelleher & Corbett, 2000; Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Havlicek & Bost, 2005; Dixon & Stein, 2005; Stein, 2006; and Yates, 2001)

According to quantitative research in South Africa by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk (1996), 15% of young people in places of safety were there because they were awaiting trial. Taking into consideration the susceptibility of this developmental phase of an adolescent and the influence of peers on behaviour, this is a worrying situation. Their frame of reference when they reintegrate into the community has to be considered. Also worrying is the unreasonably poor ratio of social workers to those in state care. This means that the human resources to follow up and give social support to adolescents leaving state care (children's homes), almost do not exist (Epprecht, et al., 2001; Meyer, 2003; Department of Social Welfare, 1997; Demont, 2002).

Two years after the Care Leaver's Act of 2000 came into effect in Great Britain, it became apparent that the needs and experiences of these young people were not understood and adequate support was therefore not available, despite qualitative studies that were done earlier (Yates, 2001). Due

to these facts, the state care leaver's successful progress and integration into society was not possible (Ajayi & Jackson, 2002; Hayes, 2002). The Duties under the Act was then proposed for councils to assess the needs of care leavers (Hayes, 2002).

As far as the researcher could establish, there are no available studies on the phenomenological experience of the state care leaver in South Africa besides the pilot study previously conducted by the author (Meyer, 2003) in partial fulfilment of an honours degree in psychology.

Given the fact that the success of a study depends on learning from the mistakes of the past and not repeating them, the general goal of this phenomenological study is to create a better understanding of the experience of late adolescents leaving children's homes. This would hopefully resolve the central problem experienced in Great Britain as explained in the previous paragraph.

There are extensive theories on the transition of the late adolescent into young adulthood. Only when investigating, analysing and describing the lived experiences of the state care leaver, will it be possible to determine if there are similarities or differences in the state care leavers' experience of their development from adolescence into adulthood. According to international authors mentioning the transition from late adolescence into adulthood, the state care leaver experiences a "compressed and accelerated transition to adulthood" (Stein, 2005, p. 17).

The study was done on the phenomenological assumption that experiences are best told, given meaning to and understood from the frame of reference of the person who lived the experiences. This understanding is fundamental to the treatment and understanding of such individuals.

Hopefully, in this way, the study would serve as a basis for future research; assist in critically looking at available theory, or be of practical value in counselling interventions.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The long-term purpose of the study was to discover relevant and new knowledge, and to create a better understanding of the experiences of the late adolescent state care leaver in the South African context.

Looking at the title, the specific goal of the study entailed finding answers to questions such as the following:

- How does the late adolescent leaving state care (children's homes) after completing high school experience adaptation into society?
- Does their experience have an effect on their perception of their own healthy psychological and social development?
- Can psychologists or researchers learn more about late adolescent transition into adulthood from looking at the experiences of this subculture in the South African society (Meyer, 2003)?

1.4 Assumptions of the Study

The researcher conducted this study from a phenomenological point of view, with the assumption that knowledge of the transitional experiences of the state care leaver into adulthood, as viewed by society, is at least partly obtainable by exploring the lived experiences of the participants. The assumption is made that the participants have the ability to think abstractly, so that they can give meaning to their experiences; have adequate verbal ability to express their feelings; as well as give sufficient psychological information of their experiences in order for the researcher to attain saturation of knowledge on the phenomenon. The researcher also assumes that no two participants' experiences are the same, but that they share similarities. The researcher assumes that the experiences shared by the participants are not the absolute truth, but rather perspectives of, reflections on and meaning given to lived experiences.

Being a phenomenological study, the aim was to gain new knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being researched. Therefore no hypotheses or assumptions were made as would have been expected from a quantitative study. Rather, the researcher was ultimately guided by the saturation of knowledge (Van Vuuren, 1991).

1.5 Statement of Delimitations

A phenomenological study does not investigate the cause or effects of the phenomenon investigated. This study only used a small sample of participants in the Gauteng area. The study did not specifically investigate the socio-cultural differences, gender differences or the economic differences of the participants. The researcher was guided by the participants in the sharing of their experiences in the search for saturation of knowledge. However, in the instances where cultural, gender or economic differences occurred naturally during the course of the interview, these were noted and discussed as a finding.

1.6 Overview of the Present Study

The study begins with Chapter 1, which consists of a presentation of the statement of the problem and rationale for the study, aim of the study, assumptions of the study as well as a statement of delimitations. Chapter 2 presents a literature overview of the experience of the state care leaver, also referring to the preliminary pilot study conducted for this research. Relevant developmental theory concerning the late adolescent and transition into young adulthood is outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 concentrates on three additional theories relevant to the transitional period from late adolescence into young adulthood.

Chapter 5 outlines the justification for choosing a phenomenological system of inquiry as a research method and outlines the foundational concepts thereof. The method followed in the current research is explicated in Chapter 6. This

includes choice of participants, the interview format and contract, followed by the detailed explanation of the analysis of the data collected for the study.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings of the study, subdivided by units of meaning as found from the experiences of the state care leaver. The data was then put together in units of similar, different and individual experiences.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, provides a conclusion of the study within the framework of an evaluation of the study. Under this fall the problems encountered in the study, the explanation for excluding some of the interviews, ethical issues, trustworthiness as well as strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter is finalised with recommendations to deal with the experience of the state care leaver, as well as recommendations for future research.

The *Informed Consent Contract* is attached as an Appendix after the list of references. The interviews are excluded from the study itself, because a contract promising anonymity was signed with each of the participants.

CHAPTER 2

THE STATE CARE LEAVER

Edwards (in Van Vuuren, 1991, p. 64) says that “in practice the best research is done by those who have read about and examined theories about the phenomena they are investigating and deeply reflected on them.” The researcher, therefore, reflect on some literature relevant to the lived experiences of the state care leaver, as I have understood it.

2.1 Definition of the State Care Leaver

In this study, the term *state care* refers to children’s homes. The words *state care leavers* or *care leavers* will be used interchangeably to refer to the late adolescent leaving the children’s home after finishing secondary school. These terms were derived from studies done in Great Britain on this phenomenon for the Care Leaver’s Act 2000 that had been established in Great Britain in October 2001 (Stein, 2005) to meet the needs of the state care leaver in society (Ajayi & Jackson, 2002; Frampton, 2002; Osborne, 2003).

2.2 State Care Leavers’ Phenomenological Experiences in Literature

In South Africa, a few studies (mostly in the field of social work) investigated school leavers from children’s homes, but they mostly focused on the models of children’s homes and not on the state care leavers themselves. Therefore, as far as the researcher could establish (also refer to Chapter 1), there are no available studies on the phenomenological experience of the state care leaver in South Africa, except for the preliminary pilot study conducted by the author (Meyer, 2003). Therefore, being a first study of its kind in South Africa, some of the experiences in literature need mention to demonstrate similarities, as well as new insights derived from the preliminary pilot study.

Paolo Hewitt (2002), who wrote a book on his own experiences in a children's home and leaving care, said his frustration centred on discrimination, his alienation from his family and the stigmatising nature of state care. His experiences of loneliness, namely experiencing that everyone with whom he formed a bond vanished in some way or another, are also illuminated. He writes that he learnt how to hide himself from the cruel world and how not to care. But, in the end, he says, his story is one of someone beating all the odds. All of these themes were repeated in the pilot study as well as in the current study about the experiences of the state care leaver in South Africa.

Frampton (2002), national chairperson of the Care Leavers Association in Great Britain and a care leaver himself, writes:

The horrible truth is that most care leavers are afraid to mention the fact [that they are state care leavers] because they fear a stigma – of having led a criminalised childhood and being 'damaged goods' or a no-hoper. It's a bit like the old racist comment: 'You're not like all the rest' (Frampton, 2002, p. 24).

Frampton (2002, p. 24) also says people ask "Why were you in care? What did you do wrong?" He says, "...[the] fact that a child may have no parents or may have asked to be put in care because of abusive parents is missed."

Similarly, Martin and Jackson (2002, p. 126) quoted a participant from their phenomenological study (for education) as saying: "I think in terms of the stigma attached to being in care, lack of opportunities available, [state care leavers] are automatically seen as being underachievers anyway. Trouble makers as well [*sic*]. ... it's [*sic*] like you're immediately set up to fail."

Martin and Jackson further state that it is well established that children from children's homes have a low self-esteem, due to experiencing rejection by their families and peers, experiences of abuse, as well as "negative stereotypes inflicted on them by society" (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 126). Martin and Jackson (2002) also mention their disgust at the public's

unawareness of the discrimination faced by state care leavers. Exactly the same was experienced by the author (Meyer, 2003) of this study when analysing the interviews. The participants repeatedly experienced that the public seemed not to be aware of their discrimination against the state care leaver.

Ajayi and Jackson (2002), doing qualitative research on the university challenge of state care leavers in Great Britain, mention previous research stating the low expectations, discouragement, lack of information and advice as well as acute financial problems these young adults had to overcome when applying for university. Those applying for university needed exceptional resilience and determination. Even when they did achieve this, they faced serious problems. Many mentioned that when they arrived at university, they were often on their own and, without good or consistent support, they felt at high risk of dropping out. It was also found that student support services at universities were unaware of the existence and needs of these students until the study done by Ajayi and Jackson (2002) began focusing on it.

In South Africa, in the process of looking for participants, a similar finding concerning student support services at universities was made by the author (Meyer, 2003) of this study.

Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003) did their research on care leavers going to university. The participants experienced not receiving appropriate help from student support services at their institutions. The researchers found that only one of the universities had a policy regarding state care leavers. The rest were not even aware of any state care leavers at their institutions. Only two higher education institutions encouraged higher education for state care leavers. The rest placed them under the umbrella of children with disadvantaged backgrounds – despite their uniquely different background and lack of social support being known. Some of the findings make sad reading, for instance some of the universities took the point of view that state care leavers could not possibly meet the requirements to finish a degree at a university. This emphasises the discrimination finding once again.

To highlight the problems they found in the experiences of the state care leavers at universities, Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003) made some recommendations to the student support services of higher education institutions. These include:

- The provision of a positive study environment, including quiet time and access to computers/internet during the day and evenings at residential units.
- State care leaver students should be advised and given the funds or bursaries to be able to live in residential care for at least the first year at university, since staying far from campus negatively influenced their studies.
- The student support services should name a personal advisor for each state care leaver at university for the full duration of their time at university.
- The social work teams from children's homes should be able to contact someone specific at each university to liaison with.
- Each university should have a policy to recruit, retain and support state care leavers who wish to study further.
- Student welfare or support services should pro-actively contact state care leaving students in order to present help with studies, finances or with any personal problems. They should also be on the lookout for any danger signals, for instance, examination marks that drop or the students falling behind with assignments and this should be followed up.

Martin and Jackson (2002, p. 128) did a similar study, which gives the phenomenological experiences discussed above. Their study states that a third of their participants experienced a strong desire for a "guardian angel". They yearned for someone to support and encourage them in their studies and with social and psychological issues. One stated it as follows: "I needed someone there for me and to praise me when I did something right... there was no positive reinforcement, there is hardly any at all..." (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124).

The emotional experiences of the participants in Martin and Jackson's research (2002, p. 124) were that of "...standing out amongst their peers as different or peculiar." The participants also felt that they did not have the resources to mix with friends, including their clothing, transport, finances and more. They experienced that in their education they were not given the opportunity and support to develop as a whole, balanced person. These experiences correlate strongly with the South African care leaver's experiences (Meyer, 2003).

According to Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003), a main cause for concern when the care leaver engaged in further education, was the lack of resources (money, clothes, transport), psychological problems as well as isolation and lack of emotional/social support. This prevented them from developing healthy relationships and engaging fully in university life. They felt that they stood out.

Pertaining to social support, it is also important to note that successful education is closely related to continuous social support (Stein, 2006), which could also be pulled through to healthy identity forming, since longer time is afforded the state care leaver to mature into adulthood when studying (Biehal, et al., 1995).

To summarise: Most of these experiences refer to the individual's experience with society and social context, for instance discrimination, shorter time afforded for development into adult identity, society's expectations, lack of social support and not having the resources and skills to make new friends. These experiences will be revisited later in more detail in the findings (Chapter 7). The preliminary pilot study (Meyer, 2003), as well as the current study, resulted in the same findings, but these two studies also provided new findings.

2.3 Other Authors on the Experience of the State Care Leaver

2.3.1 Accelerated Transition

Following the above-mentioned experiences of state care leavers internationally, more recent literature describes the experience of the state care leaver's transition from late adolescence into adulthood as compressed and accelerated when compared with the experiences of their peers leaving the family home (Stein, 2004; Stein, 2006). Stein (2005) states that most state care leavers have to cope entirely on their own with the social expectations, responsibilities and challenges of adulthood much too early in their life. This experience is highlighted by a quotation from the study of Yates (2001, p 155): "...I was going to have to start [living independently] somewhere. Just I would have liked to have started at a later date and gradually fit into it." (New Zealand care leaver). Leaving care is experienced as a final event – no opportunity to return in difficult times (Dixon & Stein, 2005). They are not awarded the time for identity search, no time for freedom, reflection or exploration. The lucky ones, who can further their education and make a success of it, are a few considering the larger group. Stein (2006) calls it one out of a hundred nationally (that is in Great Britain).

According to this wealth of research on the topic, Stein (2005) argues that the state care leavers are denied the psychological opportunity – in their transition from adolescence to adulthood – to focus their attention on their development, to deal with problems and changes over time. This significantly leads to poorer outcomes in the development into adulthood and independence for the state care leaver (Stein, 2005). He also states that they need time to explore, reflect, take risks and do identity searching. "Space out" time, as Stein (2005, p. 18) calls it.

It is of interest to state here that the study of Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003), found that the care leavers who finished a degree at university, experienced that they had been given more time than the average care leavers to learn social and life skills as well as gradually mature into adulthood. They had time to learn, for instance, to budget by their second or

third year, which was a luxury their peer state care leavers did not have. These findings were also made by Biehal et al. (1995).

To support this research, Wade and Dixon (2006) emphasises in their outcome study the value of delaying the state care leaver's transition from care (in Britain the age that state care leaver's should be followed up with – according to the Care Leaver's Act of 2000 - is 20 years of age and in some cases 23 years of age).

2.3.2 Loneliness

Also, as a result of minimal support and no monitoring (Ward, 2000), abrupt ending of social support – be it from carers, family or friends – as well as the stigma state care leavers carries with them, the researchers in this field agree that it causes an intense experience of loneliness for state care leavers (Stein, 2006; Kelleher, et al., 2000; Yates, 2001). In 1985, concerning this issue, Stein and Maynard did a survey for the National Association of Young People in Care (London), called “I've never been so lonely: A survey of young people leaving care”. Ward's (2000) study title, “Happy Birthday – Goodbye”, also illuminates the young age of and abrupt ending of support for the state care leaver. The state care leavers experienced their disengagement from care as rushed and very abrupt, especially because of the sudden ending of support (Stein, 2005). They felt abandoned at a time they yearned for support, advice and encouragement.

2.3.3 No Support, no Resources, Lack of Knowledge and Lack of Skills

Together with the young adolescent state care leavers' fair share of social, educational and emotional pain they had to carry with them in care and after, young adolescents at the age of 16 or 17 are not likely to have adequate skills to manage their own finances, career responsibilities or healthy relationships without some sort of social support. Yet, this is the case with all of the state care leavers in South Africa – whether they study further or not. They experienced no support, no encouragement and nobody to answer all their

questions (Meyer, 2003). This experience has also been described in previous research done internationally (Ajayi & Jackson, 2002), and in the research done by Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003). The researchers call it one of the main stressors of the state care leaver in the first year of university.

2.3.4 The Black Care Leaver's Experience in Literature

Barn, Andrew and Mantovani (2005) admit that, although minority ethnic groups (in Great Britain it includes young black care leavers) are overrepresented in the care system, there is a systematic failure to acknowledge and resolve a range of difficulties faced by them. The first statistical research on them was in 2001, but at the time of publishing, (2005) no research on their experiences and outcomes has been done. In this 2001 research, Barn et al. (2005) mention that the identity forming of the black state care leavers was questioned. The adolescents were confused in their religious and cultural identities, since they rather identified with their Caucasian carers (British) than with being African.

Stein (2005, p. 9) explains the cause of this when he says that “for some black young people... there was often the additional burden of isolation from the black community.” He says detachments from their community (and in South Africa we might add: from their culture) are also a high risk of disadvantage. This is something that children's homes in South Africa should clearly consider for the healthy development of the identity of these young adolescents at risk.

Stein (2006, p. 273) also says black young people “...face similar challenges to other young people leaving care. However, they may also experience identity problems derived from lack of knowledge, or contact with family and community, as well as the impact of racism and discrimination.” Barn et al. (2005) find the availability of black social workers in senior positions or black appointed carers in children's homes one of the possible reasons for this problem. Recommendations are given at the end of this study by the author for the South African situation.

2.3.5 Conclusion

These excerpts from different researches done by authors in the field should shed light on the ongoing problems that care leavers are facing throughout the world (Biehal, et al., 1995; Yates, 2001). These problems closely relate to the transitional experiences of the South African state care leavers into young adulthood and independent living.

2.4 Findings of the Preliminary Pilot Study

A pilot study was done by the author (Meyer, 2003) in partial fulfilment of an honours degree in psychology. In this study, phenomenological experiences described in other literature on the individual leaving state care were confirmed, and new experiences typical to the South African situation were identified (Meyer, 2003).

The new findings, which had not been mentioned in previous studies as far as the author could establish from literature, were lack of career knowledge as well as lack of career exposure; lack of life skills; first residential experiences as being negative due to various reasons; the experience of the children's home as a different subculture than that of society (related to acculturation); and, closely related to the experience of a different subculture, was the experience of the children's home being socially collectivistic, while society at large in the Western culture is focused on individualism.

2.5 Conclusion

Other non-phenomenological research on the state care leaver is available. It is important to note at this point that this study concentrates on the phenomenological experiences of the state care leaver and, for that reason, the non-phenomenological research has not been mentioned in this study.

To conclude this chapter, it is clear from the information that the late adolescent state care leavers themselves experience their leaving the children's home as negative and mostly as not being understood by society as a whole. The researchers in this field of phenomenological research experienced the same disgust at the public's unawareness of the experiences of the state care leavers (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

The literature overview concerning developmental theory will follow. Attention is given to both developmental stages, as well as the influences of external and internal factors on the development of the individual. This was done to enhance the better understanding of the state care leaver's experience from late adolescence into young adulthood.



CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE STUDY

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY: LATE ADOLESCENCE AND TRANSITION INTO YOUNG ADULTHOOD

3.1 Introduction

Discussing the complex stage of late adolescence and the transition into adulthood in such a short space is challenging. Therefore, the author will only briefly discuss theory relevant to the findings of this research on the state care leaver.

3.2 Discussion of Relevant Theory

Greenberger (in Fischer, Munsch & Greene, 1996) summarises her definition of *psychosocial maturity* in the development of the individual from adolescence into adulthood as a sense of responsibility towards others, equal to a sense of independence. This, for the state care leaver, does not come easy, because there is more to developmental theory than just the stability of personality. There is also change in society and expectations from society.

Baltes (in Kimmel, 1990) illustrates this in terms of change versus stability. He mentions the normative age-graded influences society has on the development of the young adult. He emphasises the social expectations of social roles, behaviours and tasks that are afflicted upon the adolescent's development into young adulthood, for instance occupation and education. This influence of society is experienced by the state care leaver, but initially leads to stress rather than development.

The reasons for this are multiple, for instance, lack of knowledge of self and careers, lack of career exposure and lack of independent-living skills and also because society expects of the state care leaver to be an instant adult – despite his or her disadvantaged background (Stein, 2005). Baltes does, however, also acknowledge the place of unique individuals in his explanation of developmental processes. Unfortunately, he mostly concentrates on young childhood and the elderly when taking these two aspects into consideration. Furthermore, he also does not take subcultural differences into consideration.

Riegel (1976), in addition, in his dialectical approach to human development, speaks of four major dimensions that influence development, namely inner-biological, individual-psychological, cultural-sociological and outer-physical. Each of these dimensions constantly interacts with each other, bringing forward questions, change and more importantly, it brings transition into the life cycle of the individual. He argues that biology, culture and the individual cannot pre-exist without influencing one another.

Riegel (in Van Ijzendoorn, Goossens & Van der Veer, 1984) also gave attention to the active influence of the environment on the individual, who is - according to him – also an active object in the developmental process. When one looks at the concept of being-in-the-world (discussed in Chapter 5) of phenomenology, it makes sense to include this theory (active being in an active world) in the better understanding of the late adolescent state care leaver. It is also of significance that Riegel (1976) acknowledges the fact that the nature of each of the dimensions he mentioned (biology, psychology and cultural-historical) influences one another. Thus, when he explains it, he concentrates mainly on an active individual in an active environment. This brings the discussion to the point at which Riegel argues that his synthetic concept is the notion that the individual should be regarded as an actively changing organism in a continually changing world. According to him, both the individual and the environment in which the individual lives would be the object of the study and research. He likes the idea of an active subject in an active world. He dislikes the formal-operation reasoning where there is no place for deviation of the norm of the Western “mainstream” psychology in the

understanding of human development. He does, however admit that the different stages of development do exist, but also says that they do not exclude each other.

The author comes to the conclusion that there are various distortions in the theories of different authors, but also that the different developmental theories all have their strengths in the better understanding of the phenomenological experiences of the late adolescent state care leaver. This includes the stage of development as well as the environmental influences on the developmental tasks at this stage of human development and the fact that the individual can reflect and act on these influences on his life.

3.3 Specific Concepts in the Development of Late Adolescence

More specific, in developmental theory, there are some key concepts in the development of the individual that guide him or her into adulthood. These developmental tasks or key concepts are, for instance, identity achievement, identity and society, intimacy, autonomy and cognitive development. Only a few will be touched on briefly because of their relevance for the state care leaver's experience discovered in this study.

3.3.1 Identity achievement

For Erikson (1968), the individual develops throughout life in stages, related to biological progression, as a result of the manner in which certain developmental crises are confronted. He specifically sees identity achievement in adolescence as one of the most important tasks confronting the individual in human development. If this task were successfully achieved, the next salient task in adulthood would be that of intimacy. The author's criticism of Erikson's stage theory is that in the state care leaver's experience, the two stages of adolescence and young adulthood are more a fluid process of development than rigid stages. Also, in the experience of the state care leaver, the development of identity and intimacy is often intertwined – some of the care leavers only finding identity after an intimate relationship, which will

be explained later when discussing intimacy.

For deeper insight into the state care leaver's experience, the author refers to Markus and Kitayama (1997), who highlight in their study, the idea of identity in the context of culture also influencing individual experiences, including cognitions, insights, emotions and motivations. Later in this study, acculturation will be explained more fully for the experience of the state care leaver.

Further, authors on the state care leaver are in agreement that the journey to an adult identity for care leavers is shorter, steeper and often much more hazardous (Stein, 2005).

According to Stein (2005, p. 27), "...leaving care should be at one with a common developmental journey, from being a young person to becoming an adult. Those looked-after young people who experienced such a journey are the most likely to find fulfilment in their careers and personal lives, and overcome the damaging consequences of familial problems, abuse or neglect. They are able to become more independent, not in an emotionally isolated way, but to move on from care into education, employment or parenthood and thus achieve an 'ordinary' or 'common' identity – not just coping as survivors, or trapped within care identities as victims, as many young people are."

Stein (2005, p. 10) promotes resiliency to facilitate positive adult outcomes for the state care leaver. He says healthy human development and resiliency are the same thing – just a rose by another name. He also connects resiliency with identity forming: "Helping young people develop a positive sense of identity, including their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-efficacy, may also promote their resilience."

3.3.2 Identity and society

Gecas and Burke (1995) clearly describe the concepts of self and identity in social psychological terms as follows:

Identity refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and other. In sociology, the concept of identity refers both to self-characterisations individuals make in terms of the structural features of group membershipsand to the various character traits an individual displays and others attribute to an actor on the basis of his or her conduct (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 42).

3.3.3 Intimacy

It is well known that in Erikson's (1968) view, intimacy entails the selection of a life partner, but that it is only possible when a secure sense of the self has been achieved in adolescence.

Looking further for a definition of intimacy is complicated. Most authors prefer to define it as a degree of self-disclosure and openness (Clark & Reis, 1988; Monsour in Fischer, et al., 1996; Montgomery, 1984). Monsour (in Fischer, et al., 1996) also mentions the capability to give and receive support, while Fischer et al. (1996) define intimacy as emotional closeness and a feeling of being cared for. In the experiences of state care leavers, it is often found that they have problems with trust and openness, and experience serious loss of social support, which in fact does influence their relationships with both genders and all ages - because of the influence on their sense of self. They do experience that they are "behind" in their development in general when first entering into society and specifically into relationships. This makes sense when one looks at the description Feldman (2001) provided on intimacy and specifically when he refers to the different levels of self-disclosure.

According to Feldman (2001), various types of relationships can be differentiated by intimacy. He describes intimacy in a social psychological sense as the degree of self-disclosure (information and feelings) an individual is prepared to reveal. He distinguishes between two different kinds of self-disclosure, namely *descriptive self-disclosure* (people sharing facts about their lives) and *evaluative self-disclosure* (people communicating their feelings).

Feldman (2001) states that the different types of self-disclosure are used in different contexts and lead to different levels of intimacy.

Feldman (2001) explains the descriptive self-disclosure as the type of self-disclosure one gets at the beginning of a relationship. As the relationship progresses, the levels and depth of disclosure increase, leading to disclosing hidden or more personal material of the individual's life (evaluating self-disclosure). This places a lot of pressure on the development of intimacy in the life of state care leavers in a negative sense, since they already (according to the literature review) experience being evaluated – and discriminated against – when sharing descriptive information about their background as coming from a children's home.

Feldman (2001) also offers a statement that helps with the understanding of problems experienced with the development of the state care leaver. He states that people sometimes cautiously present restricted amounts of information of themselves in a process of testing the reaction of the people they are in a relationship with. As the relationship progresses, the self-disclosure and related intimacy deepens or increases. Thus, it is also important in this whole process of development of late adolescent state care leavers, that they feel comfortable with who they are, so that they feel comfortable with self-disclosure. This is often not the case (Frampton, 2002).

3.3.4 Autonomy

Greenberger (in Fischer, et al., 1996) defines this developmental task of *autonomy* as self-reliance and self-reliance as being the most basic concept in autonomy:

Self-reliance...entails the absence of excessive dependence on others, a sense of control...over one's life, and an action orientation or sense of initiative. Social commitment, an underlying feature of social responsibility, entails 'feelings of community' with others; willingness to modify or relinquish personal goals in the interest of social goals;

readiness to form alliances with others to promote social goals; and investment in long-term social goals (Fischer, et al., 1996, p. 15).

This definition should illuminate the importance of society accepting the state care leaver with open (prejudice-free) arms. It should also stress the importance of the state care leaver learning independent living and other relevant social skills before leaving state care.

Stein (2005, p. 10), whose research concentrated on the importance of resiliency (overcoming the odds/autonomy) in the healthy transition of the state care leaver into adulthood, states: "...identity could be seen as connected to, as well as a component of...feeling able to plan and be in control..."

Concerning the state care leaver, Lamborn and Steinberg (1993, p. 495) also argue that, "...emotional autonomy from parents when it is accompanied by a weakened parent-adolescent relationship may bode poorly for adolescent psychological development and adjustment". This argument may be just as well applied to the children's home versus adolescent relationship. The state care leaver certainly does experience psychological stress over the poor relationship with his or her place of origin when leaving the children's home and in particular the poor relationship with the social worker. Stein (2005) specifically also talks about the role of attachment, continuity and stability in the relationship between the state care leaver and a family member (or a carer) in order for him/her to develop a positive identity and consequential resiliency.

Furthermore, the experiences of most of the participants were that of not having learnt to make decisions that influence their lives. This applies to autonomy. Fischer et al. (1996, p. 34) say that by involving the adolescent in the decision-making process, one "...acknowledges their developing individuality and autonomy." Research on the state care leaver repeats this finding (Stein, 2006; Yates, 2001; Biehal, et al., 1995).

A last adolescent task mentioned by Fleming and Adolph (1986), is the normal and gradual emotional separation by the adolescent from his or her primary care givers. The discipline structure in most of the children's homes in South Africa (Epprecht, et al., 2001), makes this developmental task for the late adolescent almost impossible, as well as making the abrupt ending of emotional bonds problematic (Meyer, 2003). Two theories being discussed later in this chapter will shed more light on this (Stroebe, Van Vliet, Hewstone & Willis, 2002).

Most important to the author, were findings mentioned by Fischer et al. (1996), about the development and experience of the state care leaver. The studies refer to the decision-making skills of teenagers. It seems from these studies, that before the age of 16, adolescents have a strong urge to break free from family, community and inherited ideas in order to reach autonomy. At 16, they appear to have acquired a host of critical decision-making skills, but then the adolescents realise that part of responsible decision-making is to also know when to turn to others for advice. In the experience of state care leavers, after leaving, the option to turn to a trusted adult for guidance is not available any more.

3.3.5 Cognitive Development in Late Adolescence

The development of late adolescents' cognitive ability play an essential role in their attempt to find meaning in their experiences, finding their identity, where they are going to and where they fit in socially. For the state care leaver, this is of particular importance.

Cognitively, late adolescents think about their experiences on an abstract level. This includes deconstructing ideas, becoming receptive to opinions different from their own, and considering alternatives (Price, 1999). The late adolescent after the age of 15 or 16 (Piaget, 1969) acquires the capacity to reflect on the process of thought itself, having an impact on how they interpret, understand and verbalise their experiences (Price, 1999).

The ability to reflect on the process of thought does not only enable the late adolescent to think about their own thinking, but it also leads to their imagining the thoughts of others. Kandt (in Price, 1999) calls this egocentrism, narcissism and self-consciousness of the adolescent, causing them to believe that others – and in particular their peers - are continually observing them.

The minimal experience of coping and knowledge brought with them from their previous social background makes the positive stimulation of these processes an important matter to consider.

3.4 Conclusion

From the above discussion and review of literature, it appears that the achievement of these key concepts or tasks is important for the development of the late adolescent into adulthood. It is also clear that their experience of discovering the self and adjusting in society has many facets, where society and development itself also have an additional significant role to play.

3.5 Society and Development

At this point in the discussion, the constructs of society and development have already been touched on, because it is part of the phenomena being investigated. Thus only a general view of this phenomenon and its applicability will be sketched:

According to De la Rey, Duncan, Shefer and Van Niekerk (1997), and Kimmel (1990), development generally refers to the progressive growth and changes in the thoughts and behaviour of an individual over time. It is a result of biological and environmental interaction. Environmental factors, according to De la Rey et al. (1997), ultimately determine whether the individual's potential will be actualised. They explain environmental factors as the individual's experiences of the outside world (e.g. social, different subcultures, etc.). Taking the experience of the state care leaver into account, the problem lies in the two different subcultural environments: The one experienced as

collectivistic (children's home) and the other as individualistic (outside the children's home). However, the experiences of the Black South African participants concerning these environments differ considerably (Meyer, 2003).

Accordingly, at the level of meta-theory, De la Rey et al. (1997), as well as Jost (2002), argue that social issues, for instance social identity, collective representation, attitudes as temporary constructs of identity and shared reality as part of self-concept, are an integrated (neglected) part of developmental psychology.

To clarify this more, an example is given: One of the most common findings in the majority of articles on the experiences of care leavers stated the experience of discrimination by society in general (Ajayi & Jackson, 2002; Epprecht, et al., 2001; Frampton, 2002; Kelleher, et al., 2000; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Meyer, 2003). This does influence their psychological health (Pearce, 2002; Sastre & Ferrier, 2000; Stroebe, et al., 2002). Discrimination also influences self-concept and consequently affects healthy social integration and development (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Kelleher, et al., 2000; Malecki & Elliott, 1999). This then demonstrates how social context has an influence on the experience of the psychological health and development of the individual and vice versa (Kelley & Breinlinger, 1996; Loehlin, 1992; Woodward, 2000).

Frampton (2002), national chairperson of the Care Leavers Association in Great Britain and a state care leaver himself, as stated previously, illustrates this phenomenological experience by lashing out against this prejudice caused by society: "These prejudice [*sic*] build injustice. We care leavers are not ugly ducklings. We are fine swans. We may not have had a nest but we still learned to fly" (Frampton, 2002, p. 24).

Accordingly, De la Rey et al. (1997) raise a relevant question: Does the socially constructed theory of human development not have the tendency to blame the victim instead of the society that stigmatises the victim? The author further poses the question: Does the socially constructed theory being based

on the Western culture, not exclude certain subcultures in South Africa?

3.6 Critique on Developmental Theory

As criticism, De la Rey et al. (1997) debate that most developmental theorists do not give an intrapsychic imperative. They rather describe a specific society's – mostly Western - societal expectations and generalise it to the rest of society (De la Rey, et al., 1997; Kimmel, 1990). This generalisation of theory, according to the view of Frampton (2002), leads to the stigmatisation and discrimination of this group of young adults and their life experiences.

To conclude the above criticism, Wrightsman (1994) makes an alarming statement when he proposes that the theorists, who seek to understand and conceptualise human development, rely on their own life experiences as a primary source of empirical material. Page (cited in Wrightsman, 1994, p. 69) calls it “disguised autobiography”.

Against the above background, the author cannot help but wonder if a complete applicable theory for the experience of the late adolescent leaving state care and developing into adulthood really does exist. The experience of the tasks of adolescence seems in some cases to be prolonged into young adulthood for the adolescent leaving state care.

Might it be that their double burden, for instance, separation from their families, trauma in their bonds from very young (Bowlby in Stroebe, et al., 2002), unresolved issues since childhood, a different subculture than that of a household with less children and healthy parent-child bonds could lead to a greater struggle in developmental tasks as given in theory? Is it possible that their adaptation to a different subculture (Segal, Dasen, Berry & Poortinga, 1999), as well as unique fears about independence (Meyer, 2003), may interfere with their normal ongoing tasks of development in adolescence (Price, 1999) – perhaps prolonging it into adulthood? The issues that could influence their development in adulthood negatively, can be summarised as:

- Resistance to the advice of adults. This is mostly because they were not allowed to question authority or to separate from their caregivers in a healthy way (Meyer, 2003). The complexity of disciplinary structures in most children's homes also causes problems in the development of autonomy (less chance to achieve control and competence by taking responsibility for their own choices). All children have to abide by the same rules and are submitted to the same punishment irrelevant of their individual personalities. Different developmental stages and tasks of development are also not sufficiently taken into consideration (Meyer, 2003).
- Difficulty in communicating with (other) adults and authority. In the children's home, there is not enough contact or exposure to adult relationships to the extent that the adolescent can learn from experience how adults communicate with each other, or how to communicate with adults in a non-submissive way.
- Search for identity. To give a simple example, most psychometric test batteries to be used for career guidance, involve a personality test. This implies that an adolescent should in some way know how he/she is perceived by others, as well as what his or her likes and dislikes are. If the search for identity is interrupted or influenced by an unstable emotional background; as well as experiencing extreme conflicting feelings of abandonment versus safety, closeness versus distance, separation versus reunion (Fleming & Adolph, 1986) - it would be difficult to combine the personality test with interest inventories to provide the state care leaver with sufficient guidance in a possible future career. Young adulthood - being a time that society expects such a state care leaver to prepare for a career - is thus influenced negatively by the delay in the search for identity in late adolescence. Schafer (1996) states that the adolescent needs to establish a social and occupational identity or he/she will remain confused by the roles he/she needs to play as adults.
- Overattention to peer approval. This developmental issue is in a sense related to the search for identity. The adolescent needs to mirror him-

/herself as to how his or her peer group perceives him/her and includes that in his or her perception of an own identity. Should the state care leaver leave the children's home, lose contact with his or her peers and struggle to make new friends in a different subculture (Meyer, 2003), it could influence his or her development and adaptation to (a different) society negatively.

- Problems of adjustment with the tension between dependence and independence. The state care leaver, more so than an adolescent from a family home, experiences the abrupt ending of bonds with his or her caregiver as very traumatic (Meyer, 2003). Bowlby's attachment theory, influencing relationships in later life concerning attachment (tension between dependence and independence), also needs mention here concerning the background of the state care leaver (Stroebe, et al., 2002).

If the above reasoning is all true (phenomenology concentrates on what the participant perceives as truth rather than an "absolute truth"), it would influence the young adult's behaviour and development – including his or her responses to society's expectations. Their responses to society's expectations will influence their adaptation as young adults into society – again affecting their development in the transition from adolescence into young adulthood negatively.

The experience of acculturation in developmental terms, as well as two theories on the experience of the transition into young adulthood, can now be considered. This is done in an attempt to better understand the meaning behind the experience of the state care leaver in contemporary societal terms.

CHAPTER 4

ACCULTURATION

4.1 Introduction

It is clear, if one looks at developmental theory as given in the previous chapter, that society plays a specific role in the developmental period from late adolescence into young adulthood. The author has found that society plays an additional role in the experience of the state care leaver because of the differences in culture. Another aspect that has to be considered is the traumatic experience of this transitional period because of various other transitional factors. The author attempts to look at it in this chapter from a theoretical point of view – using the experience of the state care leaver as basis to work from.

4.2 The Role of Culture in Psychological Development

According to Castillo (1997), every human experience has its biological origin in the neural network structures of the brain. The main neural network structures in the brain are defined by genetics. It is the patterns of neurons and connections between neurons, however, that develop through the individual's experience of his or her social and physical environment. These patterns and connections develop into a frame of reference – the basis for behaviour, cognitions and emotions and thus also the sense of self.

Therefore, Castillo (1997) further argues, one cannot look at human development and behaviour without appreciating the role that internalisation of cultural schemas (for instance, language, social rules, a belief system and behaviour appropriate to a specific society) plays in the development of the individual's identity. He says: "Culture, mental illness, and personality development are intimately related" (Castillo, 1997, p. 39). This becomes clear

when one looks at the influences of acculturation as a phenomenon experienced by the state care leaver. For this reason, the author will now turn to a discussion and review of literature concerning the influence of acculturation on the personality development of the late adolescent into young adulthood.

4.3 Acculturation

Segal et al. (1999) defines acculturation by explaining socialisation as the first set of cultural influences on an individual, coming from within one's own culture. Acculturation, therefore, is the second set of cultural influences – socio-politically influencing the individual from outside his or her own culture. When an individual experiences a second set of cultural influences, numerous psychological changes take place.

It is clear, after the analysis of the current research, that the state care leavers themselves experience their development as a transition from one culture to another. The reader must take into consideration that, prior to leaving, the participants resided in children's homes for at least five years.

Segal et al. (1999) distinguish between group-level acculturation and psychological acculturation. The author will focus on psychological acculturation, because of its relevancy for the experience of the state care leaver as seen in the findings of this study. A list of psychological acculturation variables is provided in the next table.

Table 4.1: PSYCHOLOGICAL ACCULTURATION

| Psychological Acculturation | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Variables | Description |
| Behavioural shifts | Cultural learning (e.g. dress, social norms) Cultural shedding (e.g. changing social norms) Cultural conflict (e.g. incompatibility, intergroup difficulties) |
| Acculturative Stress | Problem appraisal Stressors Stress phenomena (e.g. psychological, anxiety) |
| Psychopathology | Problems Crises Pathological phenomena (e.g. depression, schizophrenia) |
| Psychological Adaptation | Self-esteem Identity consolidation Well-being/satisfaction |
| Sociocultural Adaptation | Cultural knowledge, social skills Interpersonal and intergroup relations Family and community relations |

Source: Segal et al. (1999, p. 312).

In order to explain Table 4.1 to the reader, Segal (in Segal, et al., 1999) defines five main events taking place in the experience of acculturation:

- First, the experience of having to participate to various extents in two different cultures.
- Second, the meaning an individual appraises to these experiences would range on a continuum of problematic, benign or as opportunities.

These appraisals influence the behavioural shifts (Table 4.1, p. 33). The state care leaver that experiences cultural conflict (Table 4.1, p. 33) and understands that it cannot be dealt with using the social skills known to the individual, leads to the individual experiencing

acculturative stress (problem appraisal, stressors and stress phenomena like anxiety) (Table 4.1, p. 33), influencing his or her psychological adaptation (thus influencing self-esteem, identity consolidation and well-being) (Table 4.1, p. 33).

A problematic scenario would be when the adaptation experiences overwhelm the individual, which leads to the psychopathology (Table 4.1, p. 33) paradigm. This could result in withdrawal, separation or marginalisation – involving culture shedding without culture learning.

- Third, are the coping mechanisms applied to attempt to deal or cope with experiences that are appraised as problematic.

Segal et al. (1999) mention problem-focused coping – also called active coping (attempting to change the problem), emotion-focused coping (attempting to change associated emotions), avoidance-oriented coping, and passive coping (patience and self-modification).

These strategies, however, are only successful when the society to which the individual is adapting to, has a positive attitude towards the state care leaver. If attitudes are hostile, it leads to unhealthy levels of exclusion. This - in the experience of the state care leaver in South Africa - was often the case.

- The fourth event “is a complex set of immediate effects, including physiological and emotional reactions, coming closest to the notion of *stress*, as a ‘reaction to conditions of living’ “(Lazarus in Segal et al., 1999, p. 316).

According to Segal et al. (1999), this is what commonly happens in the case of the individual experiencing acculturative stress, psychological adaptation (Table 4.1, p. 33) and more negatively so for the experience of psychopathology (Table 4.1, p. 33), hence applicable to the

experience of the state care leaver.

- The fifth event considers the long-term adaptation experienced by the individual. Adaptation "...refers to the relatively stable changes [towards and away from adaptation], that take place in an individual in response to environmental demands" (Segal, et al., 1999, p. 316).

Individuals vary where these five steps and long-term adaptation into society are concerned, depending on the society (accepting or hostile), the individual's appraisal of a situation, personal coping mechanisms (fight or flight), and moderating factors before and arising during acculturation. The latter will be given in two tables for more clarity:

Table 4.2: MODERATING FACTORS PRIOR TO ACCULTURATION

| Moderating Factors Prior to Acculturation | |
|--|---|
| Demographic | <u>Age, gender, education</u> |
| Cultural | Language, religion, <u>distance, social rules</u> |
| Economic | <u>Status</u> |
| Personal | Health, <u>prior knowledge</u> |
| Migration motivation | <u>Push versus pull</u> |
| Expectations | <u>Excessive</u> versus realistic |

Source: Segal et al. (1999, p. 312).

Table 4.3: MODERATING FACTORS ARISING DURING ACCULTURATION

| Moderating Factors Arising During Acculturation |
|--|
| Acculturation strategies (<u>assimilation, integration, separation, marginalisation</u>) |
| <u>Contact/participation</u> |
| Cultural maintenance |
| <u>Social support or lack of (appraisal and use)</u> |
| Coping strategies and <u>resources</u> |
| <u>Prejudice and discrimination</u> |

Source: Segal et al. (1999, p. 312).

The experiences that are underlined in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 (p. 35) are those that are most often experienced by the state care leaver. These factors are repeatedly seen in the literature review of the experience of the state care leaver (Chapter 2).

And finally, since discrimination is the most common experience of the state care leaver internationally as well as in the South African research done by this author, a final word from Segal et al. (1999) applies: "It has been widely reported that the experience of prejudice and discrimination has a significant negative effect on a person's well-being" (Segal, et al., 1999, p. 320). This can be an added risk factor (Beiser et al. Segal, et al., 1999, p. 320).

Indeed, discrimination seems to be the most serious problem and risk factor facing people moving from one culture to another, also influencing their mental health and development.

The question may be asked: What does psychological acculturation have to do with developmental psychology and contemporary society? According to various authors (Aronowitz in Segal, et al., 1999; Ghaman in Segal, et al., 1999; Sam & Berry in Segal, et al., 1999), late adolescents in particular, experience substantial problems with acculturation. Segal et al. (1999) claim, "[it] is possible that ...the problems of life transition between adolescence and adulthood are compounded by cultural transitions. For example, developmental issues of identity come to the fore at this time and interact with questions of [cultural] identity, multiplying the questions about who one really is (pp. 316-317)." This correlates with previously mentioned developmental theories acknowledging the place of society in development.

To clarify the experience of the late adolescent state care leaver, the author will shortly discuss the terms *collectivism* and *individualism* as seen from a cultural perspective.

4.4 Collectivism versus Individualism

In order for the reader to understand the acculturative move for the late adolescent state care leaver, the author will provide the following overview of the two concepts collectivism and individualism:

- The primary identity of the individual in a *collectivistic* society is derived from membership in a specific social group. In the case of the Black South African culture, this social group exists out of the extended family. In the children's home environment, however, the social group is an enforced society by their circumstances and consists of the members in the children's home. The phenomenon of collectivism varies over various sociocentric cultures, but one common element is that "...the individual interests are subordinated to the good of the collectivity" (Castillo, 1997, p. 40).

The social obligations in this society are of the utmost importance and the proper behaviour of the individual is determined by his or her position in the specific society. The individual is seen by the society as not having an identity outside his or her society. The society provides him/her his or her identity in many ways. An example of this is the concept of manhood or adulthood. This is only achieved after a specific (to the culture) initiation ceremony. In the white South African perspective, this is very different. Adulthood is achieved at a certain age – more or less 21 years of age and no obligation for a specific social behaviour to attain this adulthood is expected except for the normal developmental expectations. In the most Black South African cultures an initiation involving time away from their family and the undergoing of circumcision at an age decided upon by their family or specific subculture.

- Individualistic identity, on the other hand, centres on the self. Contrary to collectivism, dependence is not a desirable trait. Autonomy, making

personal choices, personal desires and rights as well as the concepts of freedom, individualistic status and power are pursued in this society, sometimes to the detriment of other people in the community (Castillo, 1997).

If one looks at the influence of society on development (Chapter 3), it becomes evident that these two concepts play an important role in personality development.

Another issue relevant to the state care leaver is what Castillo (1997) calls the stigmatised person's adaptation to society when he/she cannot hide his or her low status. According to him, he/she tries – in the process of adaptation - to copy the dominant group of society to the finest detail in behaviour. "People with this type of psychosocial adaptation to stigma are likely to be overly concerned with order, rules, details, rigid morality, and deference to authority" (Castillo, 1997, p. 43). That these are the topics that all the state care leavers mentioned as topics of difference in the two different environments (the children's home and outside the children's home) is of some significance.

The author will look more into the practical implication of this theory when the experiences of the state care leavers are discussed in Chapter 7. At this point, it seems appropriate to mention two theories of Stroebe et al. (2002), who looked at the antecedents and consequences of leaving their primary caregivers among students in two different cultures.

4.5 Two Theories on the Experience of the State Care Leaver as Late Adolescent

4.5.1 Bereavement

Stroebe et al. (2002, p. 148) explain this leaving of the home after finishing school, missing familiar surroundings and familiar persons, and consequent feelings of extreme insecurity as a "highly stressful experience". Stroebe et al. (2002, p. 150) explain leaving the home in terms of bereavement, describing it as emotional reaction to (temporary) loss of significant persons. The authors

express that the more stressful the experience is expected to be, "...the greater the degree of [perceived] separation". They further correlate this experience with death by referring to the coming to terms with the loss, and adapting to a different environment.

The perceived experience of loss by the state care leaver is well illustrated in some titles of relevant literature on state care leavers, namely "Left out on their own" (Kelleher, et al., 2000); and "Time to say goodbye" (Osborne, 2002).

This experience of bereavement in leaving the children's home (Stroebe, et al., 2002) has, in the state care leaver's case, strong elements of the attachment theory of Bowlby (Bowlby in Stroebe, et al., 2002). A more traumatic experience is expected "...among those whose attachment is less secure" (Stroebe, et al., 2002, p. 150). "Following the reasoning of attachment theory as applied to grief experiences, an insecure style of attachment would be a predictor...." (Stroebe, et al., 2002, p. 150) of a far greater traumatic experience when leaving the children's home than leaving a family home.

4.5.2 Cognitive Stress Theory

The other theory Stroebe et al. (2002, p. 151) relate to leaving the home is the *cognitive stress theory*. They explain that individuals experiencing a severe stressor (relocation), who lack resources (social support), "...would be unable to cope with the demands of the new situation....", referring not only to work or study environment and demands, but also to social and psychological demands. This strongly correlates with the theory of acculturation as previously discussed by Segal et al. (1999). It is extremely important to take note of this theory – especially in one's attempt to better understand the high dropout rate among state care leavers at tertiary level. This could be a possible subject for future research.

Although the research of Stroebe et al. (2002) concentrated on children leaving a family home from one culture into another, these theories seem

highly relevant to the experience of the state care leaver, especially when taking the relevance to acculturation into consideration.

4.6 Conclusion on the Late Adolescent State Care Leaver

The in-depth discussion of theory relevant to the state care leaver makes it clear that there are numerous biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that influence his or her healthy development into adulthood. From general developmental theorists' point of view, development seems to be simply a matter of time, divided in stages and influenced by certain factors. The unique situation of compressed adaptation into a different society, however, makes this development more complicated and traumatic for the state care leaver.

De la Rey et al. (1997) report that the social and political silence of society about the lived experiences of particular people in society causes a stigma about the pain afflicted upon them. It is further well documented that, to name only one, discrimination does influence the healthy development of adolescents negatively, as well as their healthy integration as individuals into society (references provided in Chapter 3). Therefore, it seems that breaking the silence and attaining a better understanding to develop interventional programmes (using theory and previous research results as basis), could possibly prevent these experiences and help – rather than harm – the development of these individuals to become healthy integrated adults of society.

Although the researcher investigated theory on and previous experiences of the state care leaver, the ultimate in phenomenology is for the author to be guided by the experiences as told and given meaning to by the state care leavers themselves. The researcher thus hopes that the wide range of developmental theories described in this study, provides a more enhanced understanding of the experience of the state care leaver in the developmental period of late adolescence.

The objective of this study was to increase the understanding of the experiences of state care leavers as factors threatening or promoting their psychosocial development as healthy adult members into society. For this reason, the study used the research method of phenomenology.

The next chapter will then outline the phenomenological system of inquiry as the selected mode of research and the basis for assumptions in the present study.



CHAPTER 5

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

5.1 Justification for Choosing a Phenomenological Research Method

As this is the first study of its kind in South Africa, great importance was placed on using an acceptable research method. In this regard Giorgi (1986) devotes a paper on the issue stating that a phenomenological study is the first step in science in getting to know the phenomena. Edwards (1991) explains it as ideal to discover new knowledge and to generate hypotheses for further research purposes. Some authors in the field of social research thus seem to agree that a phenomenological study is ideal for the understanding of a phenomenon and for the discovering of new knowledge (Edwards, 1991; Giorgi, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Mouton, 2001; Neuman, 2003).

Martin and Jackson (2002, p. 128) illustrate this by arguing that using a phenomenological study into the experiences of state care leavers "...surely has a particular force and urgency coming from people who have first hand knowledge of the many obstacles....".

MacGregor, Schoeman and Stuart (2002, p. 36) say only by exploring, "...investigating, analysing and describing the experience of and reaction to [those experiences] as experienced by those involved...." would it be possible to influence their healthy psychological development. For this reason, it is vital that this group of young people be studied "...separately and specifically rather than being merely subsumed under other [theories]" (MacGregor, et al., 2002, p. 36).

5.2 The Foundational Concepts of Phenomenology

This section will concentrate on descriptions of the foundational concepts of

phenomenology as elucidated by different authors working in the field of phenomenology. Separately, they do not explain phenomenology, but together they give a clearer picture for the reader of the technique used in this study.

5.2.1 *Lebenswelt*

Valle, King and Halling (1989) have a paradoxical point of view on the place of the subject's phenomenological dialogue of his or her life experiences. They argue that phenomenology is not only the person's conscious construction of experiences. Their argument puts it that *lebenswelt* (the participant's life-world) is a co-creation of the individual's dialogue of him-/herself in his or her world. Lebenswelt happens even before the person reflects on his or her life experiences in the world that he/she experience life in. However, the argument remains that scientific knowledge cannot exist without reflecting on the life-world (Price, 1999), which brings us closer to the fundamentals of phenomenology.

5.2.2 *Being-in-the-world*

Lebenswelt alone does not make sense in describing the foundational concepts of phenomenology. One must also look at the description Valle et al. (1989) give to existential-phenomenological thought and the meaning the participant gives to his or her life experiences. This, Valle et al. (1989) refer to as *being-in-the-world* and elucidate the interrelationship of the individual with his or her world. According to this argument, each individual is interrelated with another. The individual's experience would not have meaning if it were not in the world – co-existing with the experiences of others. It is also the individual's existence (being) that gives his or her world meaning.

Maddi (1989), refers to Binswagner's three modes of being-in-the-world. They are called the Umwelt, Mitwelt and Eigenwelt. Literally, Umwelt means the *world around you*, referring to the relationship between the individual and his or her biological and physical world around them.

Mitwelt literally means *with world*, referring to the individual's social interactions and his or her perceptions of and reflection on these relationships with others, as well as with social institutions.

Eigenwelt means *own world* and refers to the individual's relationship to him-/herself – including introspection, reflections, the meaning he/she gives to his or her experiences. In the case of this study of the experience of the state care leaver, the awareness of each of these conscious modes of being is important in the gaining of new knowledge and a better understanding of their experiences. The understanding of the development of the late adolescent and transition into adulthood is also looked at from a biological, social and psychological point of view, as described in Chapter 3.

5.3 The phenomenological research approach

For Rogers (1983, p. 13) "...phenomenology describes how we constitute objects of knowledge through acts of consciousness...." for instance, acts of believing, reflecting and perceiving. This interpretational method of the subject being investigated could be a sensory experience, a mental activity or have an emotional dimension (Merriam, 1998).

Segal (1999, p.25) sees phenomenology as "...an attempt to give a direct description of experience as it is in itself without taking into account its psychological origin and its causal explanation." Merriam (1998) accentuates the interpretation the participant gives to his world, while Van Vuuren (1991) concentrates on the insight derived from the participant's experience. Van Vuuren (1991, p. 8) elaborates on his idea that a phenomenologist seeks to see the world through the *lenses* of the subject. The subject's lenses give his or her experience of the world meaning. He states that phenomenology is effective as "...continued meaning-elucidation or meaning-clarification".

The goal of the phenomenological interview is to understand the phenomena and the meaning that the interviewee gives to his or her life experiences, as well as the attaining of new knowledge. A researcher can start to learn

insights and knowledge from an interviewee only when he/she can respect and listen to the lived experiences of the participant (Merriam, 1998; Van Vuuren, 1991). Segal (1999, p. 26) explains it as "...direct, prejudice-and-judgement-free...." lived experiences of the participant's world. The answer of how to do this lies in the strengths of the phenomenological technique called *bracketing* or *epoche* (Merriam, 1998). These terms mean that the interviewer cum researcher sets his or her own ideas and concepts aside in order to be in contact with (and open to) the experiences of the interviewee as seen through the interviewee's lenses of emotions, cognitions, insights and reactions to experiences (MacGregor, et al., 2002; Merriam, 1998; Segal, 1999; Van Vuuren, 1991). Husserl (in Segal, 1999) explains it as letting go of preconceptions and all perceived ideas in order to achieve a wider perspective and openness. This brings the discussion to a related topic, namely researcher bias in phenomenology.

5.4 Researcher Bias in the Phenomenological Literature Review

Van Vuuren (1991, p. 11) emphasises that the phenomenologist cannot start researching a phenomenon without an "engaged, intimate personal reflection on the field of [the] psychological phenomena." - using it as guiding concepts or "lenses" through which the researcher sees concrete phenomena.

However, Edwards (1991) warned that a phenomenologist has to be careful in studying theories before the phenomenological study has been analysed. Even the use of language commits the researcher to theoretical assumptions. With all of this in mind, the researcher should, in the choosing of participants, interview technique and analysis, always be aware of these issues as factors in researcher bias. The answer lies in the strengths of the phenomenological technique (Edwards, 1991; Merriam, 1998; Rogers, 1983) as described under the foundational concepts of phenomenology. This means making use of bracketing or epoche, in that the researcher had to set aside her own preconceptions of what the study should find, and being open to the conscious experiences, insights, feelings and meanings of the participants being interviewed. No set questions were to be asked (except for the first

probing to start the interview) as not to lead the participants in the interview, but to be led by the participants in their conscious journey through their past experiences. This had an effect on the study in the sense that additional theories were investigated and included into the study after the interviews had been analysed.

5.5 Conclusion

A phenomenological study is necessary to provide a deeper understanding and new knowledge of what it is like for the state care leaver in his or her unique experience of circumstances. A psychologist seeks this better understanding of the realm that comes into being in the relationship between the individual's consciousness and the world – in order to better assist the state care leaver in future. Some of the questions to be addressed would be about how the state care leaver interpreted and created his or her own reality in the world. How did he/she act on and interact with his or her “new” biological and social environment, and how does it influence his or her psychological consciousness and development?

Such questions can only be dealt with by a phenomenological study, which looks at the existential understanding of the individual in the world. This deeper understanding would hopefully have positive implications for future programmes on prevention or better preparation of the state care leaver before leaving the children's home. Hopefully, it could also be used in rehabilitation or future research.

This phenomenological study concentrated mostly on a holistic integration of the participant in his or her biological, social and psychological world. Because the emphasis was on finding new knowledge on the phenomenological experience of the state care leaver and creating a better understanding, the method of the study did not reduce data into possible hypotheses. The participant was also seen as a co-researcher rather than a variable as would have been the case in a quantitative study. Phenomenological methods were used to provide access to the experience of

the world of the state care leaver.

The methodology followed in the current research to access the experience of the world of the state care leaver will now be explicated, covering various aspects of the participants, data collection and analysis.



CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHOD

6.1 Introduction

The literature study on the state care leaver's experience, the investigation of relevant developmental theory as well as the phenomenological theoretical framework as discussed in the previous chapters, gave a clear background against which the rationale for the study (as given in Chapter 1) was elucidated. It prepared the reader to look at the research approach and method as practically used in this study in more detail. The choice of participants; a note on adolescents as participants; the interview, including the written contract and the interview format; as well as the analysis of the study will now be discussed in detail.

6.2 Rationale for the Choice of Participants

The participants all fit into the aim of the study (Mouton, 2001), being South African state care leavers, having finished school and left the children's home more than three years before the interview.

Choice of time after leaving state care was mainly concerned with ethical issues (legal written consent of participant), as well as richness of knowledge that can be attained from the participant's experiences. The latter means that more experiences have been accumulated (Martin & Jackson, 2002); skills should have been learnt (Kelleher, et al., 2000; Paxton, 2002); social relationships have been formed and failed (Martin & Jackson, 2002); and the participants have had time to ponder - for deeper insights into and reflection on their life experiences (Hewitt, 2002; Butler in Kimmel, 1990).

The adolescent leaving school was chosen, because, according to

developmental theory, this age versus socio-cultural related stage of human development, expects certain psychological, social and occupational changes from the state care leaver, which are relevant for this study. Baltes (in Kimmel, 1990, p. 22) calls this “age graded” influences. Acculturation as a factor in the transition of late adolescence into young adulthood as developmental phase also applies.

The phenomenological design of the study guided the number of participants that were chosen. Some authors propose four to six participants for a qualitative research study (Edwards, 1991; Smith, 1995), considering time expenses in analysis and knowledge saturation. Van Vuuren (1991) emphasises that in phenomenology, the saturation of knowledge gained should ultimately guide the researcher in the number of participants.

The researcher, therefore, originally proposed a number of eight participants. This would have been adjusted during the course of the research, using saturation of knowledge as criterion. Pattern repetition in interviews, as well as comparing subthemes in interviews with subthemes in literature, were used to test saturation of knowledge.

The study did not look into the experiences of a specific gender, but rather at a heterogeneous group, so that more knowledge and insights could be derived from the study for future use. The same applies to cultural differences. Differences and similarities were mentioned to maximise new knowledge, meaning, understanding and insight into the experiences of the heterogeneous state care leaver in the South African context.

The researcher used the non-probability sampling method, namely chain referral or snowball method (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Bernard, 2006), as well as direct referrals. Direct referrals were possible, because of the opportunistic choice of participants for the purpose of the study. Skill in rich vocabulary description and skilful, sensitive expression of their experiences were of importance in the final choice of participants that were used for the study.

The geographical area of the study (Gauteng) was chosen on the grounds of practical considerations in terms of availability of time, resources and money for the research. Not all the participants previously resided in children's homes in Gauteng, but currently live and work in the geographical area of the study.

6.3 The Practical Choice of Participants

The participants had to fit into the theoretical choice (Mouton, 2001) of South African state care leavers, having finished school and left the children's home more than three years before the interview. Eleven state care leavers (aged 18 to 24) who resided in children's homes for five years or more before leaving after finishing secondary school originally participated in this study. Six were male and five were female. The researcher had to exclude four of the participants (the reasons will be explained later in the study). This left the researcher using four male participants and three female participants between the ages of 18 and 24. One female was a coloured South African citizen, one female and two male participants were black South African citizens and the two other males and one female were white South African citizens. All of them were Afrikaans-speaking; except for the one black South African male participant aged 24. An attempt was made to include both genders and more than one culture in order to maximise knowledge, meaning, understanding and insight into the experiences of the state care leaver in the South African context. Saturation of knowledge was found when compared with international literature on the experience of the state care leaver as well as comparing it with the findings of the pilot study. This comparison for saturation of knowledge was done consistently after the transcription of each interview.

The first five participants were obtained by contacting the heads of children's homes as well as social workers in the Pretoria and Johannesburg areas, explaining the purpose of the study and asking for referrals that fit the description. After the third interview, the researcher experienced a problem concerning the experiences. All of the participants still had contact with the children's home, which could have influenced the trustworthiness and saturation of knowledge of the study. Those that still had contact with the

children's home, for instance, were thought to be more positive towards their experiences with leaving the children's home. This had to be ruled out for the purpose of trustworthiness of the study. Therefore, the first participant was asked for a referral to a state care leaver of her own age, but with no contact with anyone at the children's home. He was the fourth participant.

After the fourth interview, the researcher also wanted to investigate a participant that had been incarcerated. It would give a broader variety of experience of the topic being explored, since no other phenomenological experience of an incarcerated state care leaver had been found in the literature study. It was also of importance, since the Inter-Ministerial committee on Young People at Risk (1996) referred in research to the unreasonably high number of state care leavers in South Africa ending up in prison.

The personnel at the different children's homes could not help the researcher, since these state care leavers normally ended contact with the children's homes. The researcher contacted a few parole officers via the police force, who brought the researcher into contact with three state care leavers. The police were still investigating two, while the third was already released. Problems were experienced with the two that were being investigated by the police. One interviewee was referred to by a teacher from a school. His interview could not be used, but he referred me to the last participant. The other two interviewees were referred to by the previous interviewees, since these participants no longer had contact with the children's homes they previously resided in. The information on reasons for exclusion of some of the participants will be given in detail in Chapter 8 under *Problems Encountered*. The exclusion of some of the interviewees left the researcher with seven participants.

6.4 A Note on Young Adults Reflecting on Adolescents Experiences

Wass (1991) describes the adolescent as cognitively moving into an abstract level of thinking; acquiring formal logical thought with the capacity for

propositional and hypoductive thinking. With these cognitive abilities, the adolescent can take ideas apart, reconstruct and combine it, challenge his or her own thought processes, consider numerous alternative ideas and thus also in the process confront him-/herself with existential questions such as: Who am I? What meaning do I find in my experiences and how do I find that meaning? Where am I going?

This cognitive development has a direct impact on how the adolescent understands, perceives, interprets and verbalises his or her life experiences, which is of importance for the phenomenological aspect of the study.

Further, the phenomenological character of the study guided the researcher to choose an array of individuals who provided a variety of specific experiences in the topic being explored. They had to be identified as young adults who had the verbal and the above-mentioned cognitive ability to provide a rich description of the adolescent experience being investigated (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Although most of the participants were already young adults at the time of the interviews, their reflections were of their late adolescent experiences leaving the children's home.

6.5 The interview

The open-ended interview (Smith, 1995) was used in this study as a method of data collection. The time spent on each interview was guided by the time it took to establish rapport and a climate of trust. After that, the time spent was guided by the interviewee, who led the researcher into his or her life experiences.

6.5.1 Written Contract

A written contract was completed at the beginning of each interview (Appendix). This included (1) information on the reason and goal of the

research; (2) written consent to participate in the research; (3) permission to use an audiotape; (4) the option of anonymity; and (5) if anonymity were asked, the option to go through the final research document to see if he/she is identifiable in the content of the research (one participant exercised this right and was pleased with the results of her anonymity). This option included a promise to change the document to their satisfaction concerning their anonymity, but this was not necessary (Merriam, 1998; Smith, 1995; Vujovic, 2002).

The rationale behind the contract was to form the basis of a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participant. The rationale behind starting the contract with an explanation of the reason and goal of the research was to include the participant as a co-researcher (Neuman, 2003; Van Vuuren, 1991).

6.5.2 The Interview format

The phenomenological interviews, in which the participants led the researcher into their life experiences after leaving the children's home, typically lasted two to three hours. One open-ended question was employed to explore the participant's experience, cognitions, insights and emotions. The initial sentence the interview was started with was: "Please explain and elaborate, with as much as possible examples and details, your experience leaving the children's home into society".

Further probing was only used when the interviewer sought deeper insight into an aspect already mentioned by the participant. All interviews took place at a place chosen by the participants, and were taped and transcribed when allowed by the participant. Notes were made of non-verbal communication and body language in order to make the data analysis more comprehensive.

An audiotape was used in the first two, the fourth and last interviews, but not in the rest, because the participants requested that the researcher not use the audiotape. When the audiotape was not used, the researcher wrote down the

dialogue of the interviews. This worked out well, since it seemed as if the participants had more time to reflect on their past experiences, leading to richer descriptions.

Special attention was given not to lead the participants in what experiences they had, in order to only receive their conscious experiences and the meaning that they gave to it. At times, Rogerian reflection was used (repeating what the interviewer thought she had heard, but in a question form), which proved to be a valuable tool in a phenomenological study to ensure that the meaning the interviewer gave, was understood. The researcher did propose repeated contacts in the research proposal, but did not find it necessary, except in two cases when the availability of time for the interview resulted in the interview being divided into two sessions.

6.6 Analysis

In qualitative analysis, the meaning and understanding of the content and complexity of meaning are central, done by a process of interpretation (Smith, 1995).

Further, in qualitative research a combination of procedures is possible (Neuman, 2003). A combination of analytical procedures had been utilised to attain the deepest knowledge, as well as maximise limitation of researcher bias. These procedures were derived from the works of Giorgi (in Edwards, 1991), Wertz (in Edwards, 1991), Edwards (1991), Merriam (1998), and Smith (1995). For simplified reading, the process of analysis is given in steps:

Step 1: Transcription

The interviews were transcribed from the audiotapes and notes into dialogue form. The participants who requested the researcher not to use the audiotape gave her permission to write the dialogue directly on paper. It was important, since the researcher found that in these interviews the participants had more time to reflect on their past experiences and this resulted in a more detailed

interview.

To protect the identities of the participants, all names were altered. This included the names of the participants, people involved with the participants, as well as the names of places that could identify the participants. In the interviews, the names that were altered, were marked with an asterisk (*). This was also done throughout the study when altered names were referred to.

Step 2: Overall perspective

The researcher first read through the raw data of the interviews several times to obtain a holistic, intuitive grasp of the experience of the participants.

Step 3: Natural meaning units of individual interviews

The raw data of each interview was then divided into manageable parts to analyse: Where there was a natural change (cognitive, affective, insights, etc.), the data was divided into new parts. Each of these new parts eventually reflected units of meaning (Mouton, 2001).

Step 4: Comparing similarities and differences between interviews

Researcher bias could be a problem in phenomenological research. Therefore, themes were found in interviews – drawing directly from the respondent's experiences. Similarities and differences, as well as single experiences, became subthemes or units of meaning (Merriam, 1998; Mouton, 2001; Neuman, 2003). This, Neuman (2003, p. 148) calls "first order interpretation". Each subtheme or unit of meaning got a separate folder (Smith, 1995).

Step 5: Coding and placing in folders

This step entailed photocopying each interview and coding it by the

subthemes already formulated in the previous step (Smith, 1995). The coded themes were cut out and put into the subtheme folders. Information that was repeated, but not relevant to the topic being studied, namely the experience of the state care leaver, was discarded (Edwards, 1991). Deeper insight followed after going through the theme folders a second time, making the findings more insightful.

Step 6: Description

Neuman (2003) explains this step as: “Because meaning develops within a set of other meanings, not in a vacuum, a second-order interpretation places the human action being studied in the ‘stream of behaviour’ or events to which it is related – its context” (Neuman, 2003, p. 148-149).

This process entailed the following: Because phenomenology does not search for causal factors, the theory was kept apart from the findings, although the theory was discussed with the findings in mind. Important to mention, more theory made sense to the researcher after analyses of the data and insights were found from the interviews, rather than starting from theory and moving towards the experience. This made the experience of the current study as a phenomenological paradigm so much richer and rewarding than the author thinks any other research design would have been.

Giorgi’s (in Edwards, 1991) procedure is to rewrite the raw data into the third person, using psychological language. Wertz (in Edwards, 1991) writes it in the second person, following the subject’s language as closely as possible. The author chose a combination of the two, in order to find deeper insight by using psychological terms and framework – yet not losing sight of the context, language and direct experience it was originally given in. This idea was initiated in Neuman (2003, p. 148). He stated that “[a] researcher weaves the data into discussions of their significance. The data is in the form of words, including quotes of descriptions of particular events” (Neuman, 2003, p. 148).

Step 7: Summary/Rich description

As a final step, the central themes were organised into a coherent summary (Edwards, 1991). Rich description was used out of raw data from the interviews. This was done because true qualitative research should be pleasant to read. With this technique, problems with trustworthiness arising from transferability are also limited, since the direct words and experiences of the participants are available for the reader – within the context that the participant gives to his or her own conscious reflections on the past (Merriam, 1998; Vujovic, 2002).

6.7 Conclusion

The aims, methods being employed, purpose and detail of the process of choice of participants, data collection and analysis of the data for the study were described, inviting transparency in an attempt to also heighten the trustworthiness of the study.

It is hoped that using the method of analysis which the researcher has used, valuable descriptions have been gained from the experiences of the state care leaver. The ideal was for the phenomenon to be understood as the participant gave meaning to it and that, by doing this, new knowledge has been gained to be placed in structures of meaning for hypotheses to be drawn from for possible future research.

The following chapter will give the findings from the study, dividing subunits of meanings into units of similar, different, individual and positive experiences relevant to the phenomenon being investigated.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.1 Introduction

In this research, the researcher has attempted to not impose a particular theory on the participants, but rather had the insights and meanings of the state care leavers' experiences speak for themselves. With this statement in mind, the researcher also acknowledges the awareness of the danger of researcher bias in a phenomenological study. Great care was taken in this regard, using the phenomenological techniques of epoche or bracketing as described earlier in Chapter 5.

The unique phenomenological experience of the individual, as well as the social context will receive attention. This is not so much done for the purpose of seeking causal factors, but rather to better the understanding of the psychological phenomena (Neuman, 2003). The broader context therefore complements the individual's unique phenomenological experience.

The analysis of the experiences of the state care leavers yielded some common themes and patterns, but also differences and single unique experiences. Where there was a natural change in the interviewing process, the raw data was divided into new parts when analysed. Each of these new parts eventually reflected units of meaning (Mouton, 2001). These units of meaning are given below. For ease of discussion, the experiences are divided into four groups: Similar, Different and Single experiences. Unfortunately, this division caused some loss of detail, which includes not seeing the pattern of events, since not all the experiences seem to have occurred in discrete periods, as stage developmental theory explains it. Thus, using data analysis as described in Chapter 6, the following themes came to the fore:

7.1.1 Overview of Findings

Similar Experiences Among Participants of this Study

- Discrimination.
- Lack of knowledge of independent-living skills; lack of knowledge of social skills, social knowledge and different social rules; and lack of career knowledge and career exposure.
- Abrupt ending of social support.
- Lack of trust.
- Feelings of loneliness, related to discrimination, lack of social knowledge and loss of social support.
- Lies about their past – related to fear of discrimination.
- First residential experiences, related to lack of knowledge, lack of independent-living skills and social support.
- Experiencing acculturation: collectivism versus individualism, which includes moving from one collectivistic subculture into another totally different collectivistic subculture, as well as moving from a collectivistic subculture into an individualistic subculture.

Different Experiences Among Participants in this Study

- Intimacy: Experiences and insights on intimate relationships.
- Making friends: Different degrees of difficulty; some positive experiences, black South African experience.
- Coping mechanisms (some different and some similar).
- Religion.

Single Experiences of Participants in this Study

- Participant Number 1: “Ek haat vakansies”.
- Participant Number 1: “Huiskomitee behandel my soos ’n krimineel”.
- Participant Number 2: “Kinderhuiskinders mag nie droom nie”.
- Participant Number 3: “Ek pas nêrens in nie” (black South African experience).
- Participant Number 4: “My ma steel my geld vir die toekoms”.

7.1.2 A Note for Ease of Reading

The author put the words of a second language in the transcriptions in inverted commas, as well as words that have been accentuated (mostly when speaking louder) by the interviewee in italics. This was done for the sake of the reader better understanding the meaning the state care leavers give to their experiences as well as for the purpose of ease of reading.

7.2 Findings and Interpretations: Similar Experiences Among the Participants in the Study

Differences in the age of participants in the study may have affected their conceptualisation and experience. The time since they have left the children's homes varies which could influence the different stages they are in, their experiences in terms of understanding its significance in their lives, time to reflect and thus also time to integrate it into their own lives.

These differences were not foreseen in the proposal of the study. However, with the analysis of the data, it was found that the variation in the experiences because of age differences gave a certain richness of data and a broader experience, which heightens the saturation of knowledge. However, despite the variations in experiences, there were similarities, which will now be focused on.

7.2.1 Discrimination

As mentioned earlier, this is the most common similar experience of state care leavers internationally. Each one of the participants in this study also experienced discrimination at direct and indirect levels. The reasons for this will not be sought, but as mentioned by Segal et al. (1999), discrimination is a risk factor in healthy development and adaptation to society. *George (personal interview, September 29, 2004), the youngest of the black South African participants, shared his emotions (regarding discrimination) very clearly: "Hierdie ding dat jy verkeerd is as jy uit die kindershuis uit kom, voel nie

vir my reg nie. Hulle sê 'racism' [*sic*] is oor, maar hierdie ding is net so." (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

*Peter explained his feeling about prejudice towards the state care leaver simply in terms of a stigma attached to him. We were discussing the fact that everybody makes mistakes. He said:

...but a person from the children's home is not an everybody [*sic*] really. You do have a stigma stuck to you because of the children's home. They almost expect to see you fail. Sorry, I know I sound bitter and angry now, but sometimes all these feelings just come back. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

This feeling of anger is also a common theme that comes out when the participants spoke about their experiences of discrimination towards them. Their experiences of anger because of the unfairness of discrimination against them and the negative implications it has on their lives are clear in all the descriptions of the participants. The anger, however, seems to get less as soon as the state care leavers find meaning in their past experiences. Their anger, however, are apparent when they remember experiences where they were viewed as criminals, being of inferior intelligence or doomed to fail. *J.J. expressed himself about this:

Verder kry mense jou net jammer as jy sê jy kom uit die kinderhuis uit. Dit maak my kwaad, want ek is nie 'n krimineel of 'n swakkeling nie. Ek is sterk genoeg om uit my eie uit dinge te bereik. Ek het dit nou bewys aan almal! Mense dink kinderhuiskinders is altyd afhanklik van ander en kan nie op hulle eie dinge bereik nie. (*J.J., personal interview, October 3, 2004)

*Henry expressed himself in the same way, but about indirect discrimination:

Ek *haat* dit as mense my jammer kry! Een ding wat mense moet verstaan is ons is niks anders as ander mense nie. In die laerskool was dit die kinderhuiskinders teen die dorpskinders [*sic*]. Jy is nie 'n kind nie. Jy is nie 'n individu nie. Nie as jy in die kinderhuis is nie en ook nie daar buite as jy klaar is met skool nie. [Praat harder] Ek is

'n mens! Hulle sê nie hulle diskrimineer teen jou nie. Jy voel nie onwelkom nie. Hulle tree net anders op. Hulle hang so 'n onsigbare bordjie om jou nek wat sê: "Shame [*sic*], hy's 'n kindershuis kind. Dis hoekom jy nie moet verwag dat hy iets reg kan doen nie. (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

The anger expressed by the participants seems to be higher in cases where the state care leavers feel that they cannot control how people see them by their conduct alone. Their experiences are that of being judged because of their background over which they had no control. *Kathryn, for instance, would like to be seen as ambitious and someone who knows what she wants from life. She experiences anger as soon as individuals stigmatising her coming from the children's home as being a problem child taint these attributes. *Kathryn shared a painful lesson and her insight learnt from her experience of direct discrimination with a best friend. The insight she shared in the first paragraph also says a lot about her experience and the influence it has had on her development:

Ek is ook bang mense oordeel my optrede as gevolg van my agtergrond. Ek wil net aanvaar word. Wou seker ook "cool" [*sic*] wees en status hê. Vir my is dit as mens so belangrik om gesien te word as iemand wat weet wat ek wil hê en weet waarheen ek gaan. Mense sien my so as hulle nie weet van die kindershuis nie, maar as hulle weet, dan verander hulle houding. Hulle dink nie meer aan jou as iemand wat ambisieus en doelgerig is nie. Hulle beïnvloed 'n mens se gevoelens baie... Dit werk rërig [*sic*] in op hoe jy dink en voel oor jouself.

Veral in die begin het ek baie in myself begin twyfel, maar later het ek net kwaad geword en besluit: Ek sal hulle verkeerd bewys al vat dit wat! Dit vat net vreeslik baie seerkry om tot op daai [*sic*] punt te kom. [She mentions an example] ...[n Vriendin se] broer was 'n prof [*sic*] by die universiteit en hy het vir haar gesê om haarself nie met my te assosieer nie, want kindershuiskinders verander nie. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

*Mary gave some more insight into her own distressing experiences. The way she reflects on it had an influence on the development of her identity as a

state care leaver:

Die eerste dag toe ek by die werk kom nadat ek vir 'n week in die hospitaal was en 'n week by die huis, toe het hulle vir my by die werk gesê ek moet 'n ander werk soek. Ek het die huis toe gegaan en ek het baie, baie, baie gehuil. Ek wou nie meer lewe nie. Ek het mos nie gevra om in die kindershuis te wees of siek te wees of dat die polisie my in die tronk moet sit omdat hulle dink ek is sleg omdat ek uit die kindershuis uit kom nie! ...Toe ek die volgende dag teruggaan na my "flat" [*sic*] toe soek hulle die "rent" [*sic*]. Hulle het my uitgesit. Die sleutel wou nie meer werk nie. Hulle het al my goed gevat. Hulle het al my klere, al my boeke en al my kollegepapiere gevat. Nou sê tannie vir my: Sou hulle dit aan 'n kind gedoen het wat 'n ma of 'n pa het wat hulle gedink het sal kwaad wees en vir hulle kind se regte sal baklei? Hulle *trap* op ons, tannie, want hulle weet ons het *niks en niemand* nie (*Mary, personal interview, January 29, 2005).

*Angelique had a very positive attitude towards being independent. Despite this, she also had experiences of discrimination. She said: "Dis regtig baie anders hier buite. Mense kyk maklik op jou neer. Veral as jy uit die kindershuis uit kom." (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

Finally, *Kathryn had an experience of discrimination which she shared with *J.J. (personal interview, September 29, 2004). He mentioned it to the interviewer and the researcher confirmed the incident by telephone with *Kathryn at a later stage. *J.J. is talking:

Sy het vir 'n ou gesê sy kom van Centurion af, waar haar pleegouers bly. Toe sê hy vir haar sy kan bly wees sy kom uit 'n pleeghuis, want sy ouers was ouers by 'n kindershuis huis en daai [*sic*] kinders maak nooit 'n sukses van hulle lewens nie. ...Hierdie mense hier buite [*sic*] kan mens nie vertrou nie! Hulle is so skelm in hulle diskriminasie van ons. (*J.J., personal interview, October 3, 2004)

Gecas and Burke (1995) provide a definition of the concept of identity. They refer to the inclusion (into your identity) of meanings others attach to one's behaviour (e.g. when expected to fail because one comes from a children's

home), as well as one's behaviour concerning the structural features as a member of a group (e.g. when they discriminate against the state care leaver's children's home background). *Kathryn (personal interview, September 10, 2004) and *Henry (personal interview, September 17, 2004) especially talked about meanings attached to oneself that are inflicted by others because of their children's home background (discrimination and the influence it has on their identity). *Kathryn mentioned the incident where she lost a friend because her brother asked her not to identify with someone who could not change – meaning that she was a problem child from a children's home. *Peter (personal interview, July 30, 2005) explained it best when he said "...but a person from the children's home is not an everybody [*sic*] really."

If society then discriminates and stigmatises the state care leaver as the reader had seen in the experiences mentioned above, it should be clear that it would influence the identity development of the state care leaver negatively. This statement is confirmed by theory mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study.

Erikson (1968) specifically mentions identity achievement as part of the developmental stage of adolescence, while the young adult state care leaver often still struggles with an identity crisis because of experiencing serious, direct and indirect discrimination by society. Erikson also says that the next stage of intimacy can only start once the crisis of identity achievement has been handled successfully. Although this is certainly true in some instances, intimacy has another place in the experience of the state care leaver. Many of their experiences were that of cultural learning only once they were in an intimate relationship and thus helping in the development of their identity achievement. For some of them, acceptance without discrimination only came within an intimate relationship with someone from the society outside the children's home. These intimate relationship experiences will be mentioned later in this chapter in more detail.

The reactions of the state care leavers on discrimination seemed in general to be that of anger. Some of them reflected on their experiences of discrimination and tried to use their anger as energy for their coping

mechanisms. *Kathryn (personal interview, September 10, 2004) studied harder to try and prove herself as ambitious and J.J. (personal interview, October 3, 2004), although he still had a lot of anger, tried to redeem himself as having made it on his own without help from others.

The discrepancy in the state care leavers' experience between what they expect to find in society and how they experience it is the source of much confusion, anger and anxiety. The description by Segal et al. (1999) of the five main events taking place in acculturation, explains another side of this experience of the state care leaver in the context of adaptation into society.

According to Segal et al. (1999), the acculturation process starts with the individual having to participate in two different cultures to a certain extent. This includes learning the new culture (e.g. dress, social norms), shedding the old culture (e.g. changing social norms) and in the case of difficulties, there is the cultural conflict (e.g. incompatibility, intergroup difficulties). In the case of cultural difficulties, the experience of the individual leads to acculturative stress. *Acculturative stress* is described as problem appraisal, stressors and stress phenomena (e.g. psychological problems, anxiety). It is the meaning the state care leaver appraises to his or her experiences of discrimination that could range from problematic, benign or as opportunities.

Segal et al. (1999, p. 320) mention, regarding development, that the experience of discrimination and prejudice "...has a significant effect on a person's well-being".

Therefore, it is apparent from the state care leavers' experiences that they appraise discrimination as problematic and experience stress phenomena like anger and anxiety, which are already acculturative stress. This, according to Segal et al. (1999), influences their psychological adaptation thus influencing self-esteem, identity consolidation and their general well-being or satisfaction (Table 4.1, p. 33).

Coping mechanisms applied to attempt to deal or cope with discrimination

were also mentioned in the interviews, which links with Segal et al. (1999) referring to coping mechanisms used to cope with experiences that are appraised as problematic.

Segal et al. (1999) mention problem-focused coping – also called active coping (attempting to change the problem), emotion-focused coping (attempting to change associated emotions), avoidance-oriented coping, and passive coping (patience and self-modification).

According to Segal et al. (1999), these strategies, however, are only successful when the society to which the individual is adapting to, has a positive attitude towards the state care leaver. If attitudes are hostile, it leads to unhealthy levels of exclusion. This - in the experience of the state care leaver in South Africa - was often the case.

7.2.2 Lack of Knowledge

a. Lack of Knowledge of Independent-living skills

Fleming and Adolph (1986) mention one of the real conflicts in the developmental process of the adolescent into young adulthood as being dependence versus independence. Greenberger (in Fischer, et al., 1996, p. 15) calls it self-reliance that entails "...the absence of excessive dependence on others, a sense of control over one's life...". Looking at the following experiences stresses the importance of the state care leaver learning independent-living skills in order to reach autonomy or self-reliance.

All of the state care leavers expressed a frustration over a lack of knowledge of general independent life skills and the negative feelings that accompany having to ask someone for help. These quotations also provide sad reading about premature independence, as international research has already shown as having a negative effect on adult outcomes (Biehal, et al., 1995; Yates, 2001; Stein, 2006):

[Sy meisie het hom] ...gehelp om finansiering te kry om 'n motorjie te koop... My

rybewys het ek deur oom [his guardian] gekry toe ek 21 word, maar ek voel ek moes dit al gehad het toe ek klaar maak met matriek soos al die ander ouens wat in die Technikon was. Mens voel agterlik! Weet jy wat doen dit aan hoe jy oor jousef as mens voel as jy nie die helfte van die goed kan doen wat ander ouens jou ouderdom kan doen of van weet nie. ...As jy dinge nie kan doen nie en nie iemand kan vra nie, dan vra mense vrae. (*J.J., personal interview, September 29, 2004)

Following is the experience of *George mentioned earlier about reading and writing: “Ons het by die ou gestremde skool [*sic*] net werk gedoen en nie geleer lees en skryf nie. Ek kan net my naam skryf. Ek wil leer lees, want mense mors met jou as jy nie kan lees nie. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

*George also mentioned learning to work with a budget, which was repeated in all of the interviews:

Jy weet nie altyd wat om te doen hier buite nie. ...Die kindershuis het my gehelp die bankrekening oopmaak, maar as ek iets alleen moet gaan doen ek sal nie kan nie. ...Jy weet nie hoe om met die geld te werk nie. Moet ek dié koop of dié koop [*sic*]. Jy weet nie. Die eerste paar maande ek het gesukkel. Ek het baie gesukkel. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

When the state care leavers perceive themselves as not having the necessary social skills to deal with their adaptation experiences, the experiences become overwhelming. This, according to Segal et al. (1999), leads to the individual experiencing acculturative stress (problem appraisal, stressors and stress phenomena like anxiety) (Table 4.1, p. 33), affecting his or her psychological adaptation, thus influencing self-esteem, identity, consolidation and his or her feeling of well-being negatively. This could result in withdrawal, separation or marginalisation.

For *Henry, experiencing that his social skills and independent-living skills were not adequate to handle life's problems, was a very negative experience.

Ek is bang om met vreemde mense te praat, bang om iets nuuts te doen. Bank toe selfs. Ek kry sommer 'n beklemming om die hart. ...Dis moeilik omdat dit 'n ander wêreld is. Ek is onopgevoed in daai *[sic]* opsig. Ek weet nie eers wat is finansiering nie. ...Die kans om jou kop te stamp is baie goed. 'n Mens is so bang jy lyk "stupid" *[sic]* oor jy niks weet nie en jy lyk soos 'n mislukking. 'n Man moet mos dinge weet en as jy nie weet nie... waar kom jy vandaan? (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

Finally, *Kathryn gave some insight into her experience surrounding the lack of life skills:

Nou die dag wonder ek "hoekom weet ek nie van daai *[sic]* goed en hoe om iets te doen nie." Byvoorbeeld algemene goed soos rekeninge betaal, afspraak maak en hoekom kan ek nog nie bestuur nie!

Die bestuur is my grootste "issue" *[sic]* en stres! Ek kan onderskeidings in my akademiese kry, maar ek kan nie my "licence" *[sic]* kry nie! Ek is skaam om mense te vra, want almal het hier aangekom en kon al bestuur. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

She also mentioned self-discipline and time management as something that one has to learn the hard way, because one has never been afforded the opportunity to learn for oneself.

*Peter talked a lot, but since this 24-year-old's experience gave so much insights and understanding of the experience of the state care leaver and the effect it has on their development, the author decided to use all the experiences he talked about:

It's just so suddenly, man! Suddenly, after being so absolutely dependent and having everything put out in strict rules and structures... Then the sun rises again and there's *nothing!* You are on your own, boy! No advice. No support. No questions can be answered. You just gotta *[sic]* learn the bloody *[sic]* hard way! Maybe they can....(t)each us some skills before the time?

[The researcher asked *Peter what skills he was talking about.]

Well... how to start a decent conversation with your girlfriend's parents, how to open a bank account, how to budget, how to pay your electricity, how to make a shopping list, the do's and don'ts of a work interview, what life is like out here, knowing what jobs are available for what you like to do, budget for shopping, making friends out here and what they expect of you, the value of rules and *why* you should keep to it. ...but we are just not prepared like kids from normal [*sic*] families. ...We are streetwise, but we have no skills. ...Obviously we don't have the clothes and the gear to impress and also not the skills they use to build relationships. Man, you feel so out of place out here. They should give us a "veldskool" [*sic*] for three months in the real world instead of in the "bosveld" [*sic*!]

It would also be nice if you could have someone you could ask questions about life out here. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

According to the literature review, it is possible that their adaptation to a different subculture (Segal et al., 1999), as well as unique fears about independence (Meyer, 2003) may interfere with the state care leavers' normal development in adolescence (Price, 1999). It seems very clear from all the experiences thus far that in the adjustment to society the state care leaver does indeed experience the tension between dependence and independence.

*Mary, awaiting her soon-to-be-born baby after being violated, imprisoned without trial for information, being sick for two weeks after being released and subsequently lost her work had an attitude of dependence (someone must help her), which is striking, since she otherwise seemed to shy away from people. She expressed herself like this:

Ek soek net glad nie weer 'n man in my lewe nie. Ek bly maar net bid en wens dat iemand my kan help om my diploma klaar te maak. ...So ek weet nie hoe ek weer gaan aan die gang kan kom nie. Dit voel my lewe is oor, want ek weet nie waar moet ek beginne [*sic*] nie. Ek vertrou niemand meer nie. (*Mary, personal interview, January 29, 2005)

The conflict between dependence and independence inside *Mary (personal interview, January 29, 2005) is clear. It also correlates with the theory of Baltes (in Kimmel, 1990), emphasising the social expectations of social roles, behaviours and tasks that are afflicted upon the adolescent's development, being, for instance, occupation and education. In *Mary's case the influence of society's expectations (Stein, 2005) is experienced, but rather leads to stress than to development. If she had been taught the correct skills and had resiliency, it could have made life much easier for her being on her own.

*Angelique's experience is different from the others where independent-living skills are concerned. She felt that the programme she attended gave her an advantage over her sisters, who left the children's home before her without learning these skills.

(The interviewer asked *Angelique if she struggled financially, because she mentioned having to look after her two sisters, their two babies as well as her mother.) She answers:

Ja vreeslik, maar ek moet darem sê ek het mos geleer om 'n "budget" [sic] uit te werk. En waarvoor hulle kyk as jy vir 'n "interview" [sic] vir werk gaan en om 'n "CV" [sic] te skryf en so aan. (The interviewer asked her where se learnt these skills.) Voor ons by die kindershuis uit is, het die maatskaplike werker gereël vir mense wat ons daai goete [sic] kom leer het. En hoe om jou klere te meng en pas en jou mooi te versorg en alles. Dit help vreeslik baie, want ek dink nie ek sou my sussies en alles kon "handle" [sic] as dit nie daarvoor was nie. Hulle het ons baie geleer. Mens kon self besluit om te gaan. Mens is maar onseker voor jy uit die kindershuis uit gaan, want jy weet nie wat wag vir jou nie. Enige bietjie inligting help vreeslik baie. Ek is so bly hulle het ons dit geleer, want my sussies het nie en ek kan sien hulle "suffer" [sic]. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

She also mentioned working at a restaurant at night to further her income. It is important to mention this, because she talked about it later.

It is evident from *Angelique's experience that the skills she learnt gave her a certain amount of resilience to handle the other experiences. It is not clear whether her personality had an influence on how she experienced leaving state care, because it is not the purpose of the study. It is, however, clear that *Angelique's reflections on her experiences and comparing it with that of her sisters, gave her the insight that her social skills training had given her the edge over the others. It does, when one looks at her dialogue, also influence her self-esteem positively knowing that she has certain skills to make a better life for herself and her family.

Dit sou beter wees as ek self kon gery het, maar mens leer nie by die kindershuis om 'n "learner's" [sic] of so iets te kry nie. Mens leer nie daar om te bestuur nie. Ek dink hulle dink ons kan seker in elke [sic] geval nie 'n kar bekostig nie. Maar ek sou kon as ek by 'n beter plek kon "waiter" [sic]. Nou weet ek nie, want ek het nie nog geld ook vir leer bestuur en ook nie tyd nie, want ek werk én ek "waiter" [sic] om net te kan oorleef. Ek voel dit sou beter wees as ek kon self ry [sic]. Dit sou baie gehelp het, maar nou voel mens jy kan nie opstaan uit jou omstandighede uit nie. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

*Angelique was also aware of the dependency problems experienced by state care leavers. She said: "Mens kan so maklik die fout maak om te dink dat mense vir mens moet aanhou sorg hier buite, want dit lyk dan so maklik in die kindershuis." (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005). However positive, she also experienced not having enough life skills. *Peter (personal interview, July 30, 2005) also mentioned this awareness of dependency being learnt in the children's home by people from outside instead of being taught independency and what effect it has on self-esteem. In this regard, Stein (2005) mentions the correlation between feeling that one is of worth and being resilient to cope with life changes.

A little later in the conversation, *Angelique was positive again: "Ek het *gewerk* vir alles wat ek het. Dit maak my darem bietjie trots op myself, want ek kyk na my sussies en sien dat hulle dit nie kon doen nie." (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005) *Angelique's experience seems to illustrate

a certain extent of resilience above that of the others, which could give one an idea about the importance of the lack of independent living skills.

It seems from the interviews with these state care leavers that they experienced a dire need for learning independent-living skills before leaving the children's home. They all experienced that without these independent-living skills, they felt trapped in the cycle of problems from which they came (their parents). They all felt much more vulnerable to leave the children's home without these skills. It is also clear from the interviews that the state care leavers felt that their self-esteem and well-being were being affected by this lack of independent-living skills. They stressed the need to be empowered through education, training, experience and realistic exposure before leaving the children's home in order to develop sufficiently into being a productive adult in society. Much more attention is given later in the recommendations to this matter, flowing from research, as well as from the interviews.

b. Lack of Social Skills, Social Knowledge and Different Social Rules

The experience of the state care leaver in general is one of not knowing the society as it is outside the children's home, feeling isolated and finding that difficulties to adapt socially brought back painful memories. Some of the participants gave particular attention to the fact that they did not know how normal families and friendships function, but only realised that they had the wrong idea when they were out on their own and nobody to talk to. *Kathryn provided the first example:

[Ek was] eers baie opgewonde, maar ook onseker. ...want daar is niemand by die universiteit wat ek ken nie. Dis 'n vreemde wêreld vir my daar buite. ...die soort met wie ek nog nooit gesosialiseer het nie, het nou skielik my ruimte met my gedeel.

... jy weet nie rêrig hoe werk die wêreld en regte *[sic]* gesinne nie. In die kinderhuis pas die naweekouers hulle by jou aan of hulle wil jou nie ontstel nie of hulle bederf jou net die hele naweek. Dit was TOE "nice" *[sic]*, maar nou sien ek regte gesinne vir die eerste keer en die hele tyd vergelyk ek. Dis eintlik skokkend. Dit het pyn en

herinneringe teruggebring. Ek het gewens dit het in die kindershuis al gebeur, want toe kon mens met iemand praat daaroor. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

Once again the explanation of Segal et al. (1999) is applicable. They explain that when state care leavers perceive themselves as not having the necessary social skills to handle their adaptational experiences, the experiences become overpowering. This would lead to the individual experiencing acculturative stress (problem appraisal, stressors and stress phenomena like anxiety) affecting his or her psychological adaptation, thus influencing self-esteem, identity, consolidation and his or her feeling of well-being negatively. This could result in withdrawal or separation. This is the case in the experience of *George. *George expressed his intense loneliness because of the difference in social rules. He experienced himself as separate from society (withdrawal). He also mentioned that it made him scared to be outside the children's home because he did not understand the social rules.

Dis hoekom ek somtyds alleen sit en stil is, want ek is nie gewoond aan hier buite nie. Ek ken nie so die reëls hier nie. Dis moeilik. Ek kry swaar. Dis nie lekker nie. Ek pas nêrens in nie...

Ek is ander maniere geleer. Ek wonder watter maniere is die regte – myne wat ek geleer het of hulle se maniere. Ek wonder baie. Ek weet nie of ek pas nie. Ek is bang vir hier buite. Nie gewoond aan hier buite nie. Bang vir die mense. Jy's nie gewoond aan wat hulle doen nie. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

A further word from *Kathryn about social rules and how it influenced her:

Ek wou maar soos hulle maak om in te pas, byvoorbeeld geld spandeer soos hulle, ensovoorts. Toe ek buite beheer raak – emosioneel, depressief, angstig en hartseer en so aan – toe weet hulle nie hoe om dit te hanteer nie, want hulle verstaan nie onstabiele situasies nie. Die sosiale reëls is net eenvoudig nie dieselfde as wat mens aan gewoond raak in die kindershuis nie. Mens moet jouself amper apart hou om

finansieel en emosioneel te "survive" [*sic*]. Mens pas eintlik nêrens in nie. Nie meer by die kindershuis nie en ook nie by hierdie nuwe klas mense nie... Ryk kinders en hulle beginsels was *vreeslik* anders! (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

With the experiences expressed here, it is evident that there is a constant feeling with state care leavers that they do not fit in socially. They experience their social rules as different and the social knowledge and skills they have as running far too short to be of much help for adapting adequately.

*J.J. confirmed *Kathryn's experience, when he said, "...die reëls hier buite die kindershuis (is) anders as daar binne. Dis baie meer streng. Meer eng. Sosiale reëls is anders. Heeltemal anders. ...Ek het net nie (hierdie sosiale reëls) geleer nie. Ek sukkel nog om aan te pas." (*J.J., personal interview, October 3, 2004)

Although there are many similarities, *Peter also experienced his situation as a black South African man quite different from the white South African state care leavers. He felt that he did not have the social skills to know how to make friends with black South African people, since he grew up in a white South African culture. Cultural differences are one of the biggest problems he experienced and should be taken note of.

For now, it is important to explain the influence that the lack of social skills and knowledge has on the development of the individual. Although there were cultural differences in some of the experiences, it was of specific interest that *Peter experienced subcultural differences intensely. This influenced his development into an intimate relationship, his identity and thus hindered his overall development, since all these tasks are of importance in the development of the late adolescent into young adulthood.

*Peter's experience:

[The people outside the children's home] are just not the same. They come from a different background. Especially the blacks [*sic*] have all a culture of their own. They grow up with it and now I suddenly come and have no cooking clue [*sic*] what's what

[sic]. My background, except for the children's home with strict rules blahdiblah *[sic]*, is also growing up with white people! I know the rules and cultures of white people *[sic]* and often the black people *[sic]* frown at me out here for the way I do something. Sometimes they think I'm a foreigner. A foreigner steals the jobs, take your woman, they have secret bad powers. It is sometimes funny, because I'm thinking I grew up in the same country as the other blacks *[sic]*, but I feel like I come from another country because of the way they do things, talk about things, their languages they all can communicate. Oh man! It's totally a different world out here! It would have been easier to make friends with whiteys *[sic]* if it had not been so different in the home as out here. It's difficult to get up *[sic]* in the world if you don't know the rules (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005).

*Peter, as well as *Kathryn also experienced learning to reason about discipline and social rules was a very important social skill that they have not been taught. They experienced the discipline in the children's home as strict and rigid and not accommodating the individual. It is important to note here that *Kathryn and *Peter came from children's homes in two different provinces in South Africa.

They experienced the process in which they should have learnt to make decisions and to find their own way of creating structure in their lives as absent. According to them, it influenced their feelings of individuality and affected their feelings of autonomy once they have left the children's home.

Although the author only mentioned *Kathryn and *Peter, the experiences of most of the participants were that of not having learnt to make decisions that influence their lives. This applies to autonomy. Fischer et al. (1996, p. 34) say that by involving the adolescent in the decision-making process, one "...acknowledges their developing individuality and autonomy." This then is true for the development of the late adolescent state care leaver in South Africa. *Kathryn's experience was already given earlier in this chapter. *Peter's experience follows:

Everything was black and white [in the children's home]. You were not allowed to ask questions about rules. You were not allowed to reason. It was just yes or no. Rules were there to protect you. ...You had no choice. ...I think it's natural to want to choose, but we never had the opportunity to learn to choose. You learn out here that some people's rules are different from others and you just want to fit in the best you can. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005).

*Angelique experienced the same lack of social skills and knowledge. She felt that she did not have the skills to make friends or to know what was expected of friendship. Her idea was that people liked someone who worked hard and that it should make life easy for her if she only concentrated on that.

...da's [*sic*] altyd meisies wat my nie "like" [*sic*] nie. Ek doen seker iets verkeerd wat ek seker nie eers van weet nie, want dis mos maar anders hier buite. By die eerste werk het die baas baie op my geskree. Ek is 'n maklike mens en ek werk hard en hou my by die reëls, so ek ken nie hierdie maniere wat die mense op my uitgehaal het nie. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

Whatever the situation, the lack of social knowledge, social skills and the differences in social rules are experienced as very traumatic by the state care leaver. Later on the author will look deeper into intimate relationships. More detail will then be given on the state care leaver's experiences and insights concerning social rules in these closer relationships with the opposite gender.

When one looks at what Segal et al. (1999) say about adapting (which influences their psychological development into young adulthood) to society, it is clear from these experiences that there are far too many negative variables affecting the process of healthy development and integration into society. Segal et al. mention moderating factors prior to adapting into another culture (or in this case another subculture). Some of the factors applicable here are social rules that were different, status (as experienced by *Kathryn), prior knowledge (experienced by all), and the excessive (not realistic) expectations they had of how easy it would be to adapt. More examples are also given later when discussing the other similar experiences.

Greenberger (in Fischer, et al., 1996) calls the developmental task (of autonomy) self-reliance and mentions that it is the most basic underlying concept of autonomy. Greenberger further states that excessive dependence on others should be absent (which is not, because they are in the habit of expecting to be looked after) and that one should have a sense of control over one's life. Social commitment should entail feelings of community with others, which would be difficult if one, as with the experience of *Angelique and *Peter, feels that one cannot make friends because the social knowledge one has is simply inadequate.

Finally, an excerpt from *Kathryn's second interview, gives a very clear understanding of the effect that wrongly learnt social rules can have on the experience of the state care leaver. The dependency she mentioned, influenced her relationship with this family negatively, until they could resolve it. *Kathryn's important learning curve in her learning of new social rules needs mention:

I always used to ask them [the family who tried to be her social support] stuff that I did not really *need*. Stuff I wanted to be "in" [she shows inverted commas with her fingers] with. Then, one day, *mrs Mecchi told me that she loved me as much as her own child, but that at a stage in our lives I will have to start standing on my own two feet. ...I was thinking it is typical. They have everything and I have nothing and all the rest of the 'sorry-for-myself'-feelings that goes [*sic*] with it. I must have said it to her as well, because she then sms-ed [*sic*] me that any parent that really loved their daughter would at one stage have to let go, so that the adult bird can learn to fly on her own. She said that I was not only a bird, but in her eyes an eagle. That made it different, because an eagle has to be a strong flyer. ...They would be there for me if I really needed help.

...I realised that *that* was exactly my problem, as well as those of all the others that came out of the children's home with me. We are so used to being cared for. We get everything we need and don't ever learn the concept that we have to earn it. The *Mecchi daughter is four years old. She has to make salad for

dinner for pocket money if she wants clothes for her Barbie. They can afford to buy her what she wants, but they don't. That's what we did not have. And when mother *Mecchi screams at her girl, she says afterwards that she's sorry. And when the parents have words, they make up in front of their daughter. She knows how to do things and I know Mrs *Mecchi once worked as a waitress at night when they were married for a long time already, so that her husband could relax about bringing in money while he was busy with his studies. ...We don't know the first thing about standing on our own two feet when we come out of the children's home. We are so used to stand "bakhand" [*sic*] [with open hands to receive] for what we need and you have to tell yourself that it's normal for people to want to look after us, otherwise you will end up having a very low self-image. Then, when you get out here in the real world, it doesn't work like that anymore. ...Two different worlds expect two different pictures you must have of yourself and we don't know that until someone tells you that. And hell, then it hurts, because you have to jerk your whole existence to a standstill and ask, while the world around you do NOT stop and wait for you: Who am I? How do other people see me? What must I be to fit in? And the answers are different from what you thought of yourself... (*Kathryn, personal interview, June 12, 2005).

***Peter had similar insights into the lack of social knowledge and where he thought the problems originated:**

We talk in the children's home after a weekend. We compare families and we are jealous if someone gets more than you do. We also see that those families don't fight so much as we do. Makes us think we're problem children, because we *do* fight. We differ. We rebel – *a lo!* No man [irritated], someone should give a list of things to do, why and what not to do to every new family that takes kids for weekends or holidays. Or tell us WHY you are doing what you are doing different! Rather show us what reality is! ...we get an attitude that everybody gives when we suffer. The people teach us that and then they say you must stand on your own two feet just suddenly one day when you leave. Just like that [flicks his fingers]. And you don't know how and nobody there to show you how. Just like that. Alone. Dropped in the deep end [*sic*]. It's so bloody [*sic*] hard, man! (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005).

Except for their experience (*Angelique mentioned the same), the insights that *Kathryn had into this experience and how it influenced her to develop once she felt she had more knowledge than before, also having insight into other social aspects of importance, give a clearer understanding of the delay a lack of social skills, knowledge and difference in social rules causes in the development of the identity of the state care leaver. The better understanding, however, of the experiences, could turn the negative experiences of these participants into positive experiences for state care leavers in future.

c. Lack of Career Knowledge and Career Exposure

According to Schafer (1996) the adolescent needs to establish an occupational identity or he/she will remain confused by the roles he/she needs to play as adults. The following experiences shared by the state care leavers give meaning and understanding to this theme:

Jy weet, in die ou dae is die ouens "army" *[sic]* toe. Ek het nie tyd gehad om te besluit nie. Na jou laaste matriekeksamen is jy verplig om uit te gaan. ...Ek het glad nie, glad nie geweet wat daar buite beskikbaar is in terme van moontlike beroepe nie (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004).

Toe ek moes aansoek doen vir universiteit, was ek so dom. Die maatskaplike werker het my gehelp om inligting van die universiteit af te kry, maar sy was ...Half geïrriteerd. Seker oor sy so baie ander kinders het om ook oor te "worry" *[sic]*. ...Ek het glad nie geweet van al die rigtings nie. Ek was glad nie blootgestel aan mense met grade en verskillende beroepe nie. Ek het nie 'n idee gehad nie! ...mens het ander belangstellings ook. Mens weet net nie daarvan [different careers] nie, want jy word nie blootgestel daaraan nie. Hoe sal mens nou weet of jy van iets hou as jy nie weet dit bestaan nie. ...Dit moet drasties verander, want mens kan nie met die trust 'n geleentheid kry om te verander...nie. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

*J.J.'s experience:

Ons is saam met die skool na die Technikon se ope dag toe. Dit was die ekonomieklas.

Hulle sê ons daai dag niks van IT en netwerke nie. ...Ons het nie geweet wat gaan buite die kindershuis aan nie. ...die mense wat ek ontmoet het, was maatskaplike werkers, sielkundiges, onnies, dominee en besigheidsmense, so ekonomie. Ek het nie blootstelling gehad nie en ook nie 'n "clue" [*sic*] gehad wie om te vra nie. Ek het gedink dis al wat hulle aanbied by die Technikon. Nie geweet wie om te vra nie. Eers nadat ek geregistreer het en na die doop, toe hoor ek daar is ook ander rigtings. Toe kon ek nie verander nie, want ...die trust [where some children of specific children's homes get bursaries] sal nie dit doen nie. (*J.J., personal interview, September 29, 2004)

Although the same finding (lack of career knowledge and exposure) has not been made in previous research, something similar was in the phenomenological experiences found from previous research by Ajayi and Jackson (2002). They mention feelings of discouragement, and lack of information and advice. They also note that those who applied for university needed exceptional resilience and determination.

Since young adulthood is a time when society expects an individual to master the social role and behaviours of occupation and education (Baltes in Kimmel, 1990; Stein, 2005), it places a huge amount of stress on state care leavers. They experience their exposure to graduates (*Kathryn) and different career opportunities (*J.J.) as inadequate. Thus it can be summarised as a lack of knowledge of the self and careers as well as a lack of exposure to different careers. Segal et al. (1999) rate it as a crucial factor in the process of adapting to a new society and yet it is absent in the experiences of these young people.

As mentioned earlier in this study, as well as by Demont (2002), children from children's homes really struggle with identity achievement. The lack of knowledge of the self; careers they should enter into and of a society they should learn to adapt to, is therefore not advantageous for their healthy transition from late adolescence into young adulthood.

This then seems to be a serious problem specifically in South Africa, and should receive more attention in a South African study concentrating on

educational success. A recommendation is made in Chapter 8 regarding career knowledge and guidance.

7.2.3 Social Support

The experiences of every participant in this study include feelings of anger and despair about abrupt ending of previous bonds. It is also a theme mentioned in previous literature (Stein, 2005; Ajayi & Jackson, 2002). *Henry shared his feelings: “Ek het iemand gesoek om na my te luister. Iemand wat “genuine” [*sic*] omgee en vra hoe dit gaan. Iemand wat raad gee.” (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

Similarly, *Kathryn expressed her disgust:

Ek voel net die maatskaplike werkers kan gerus so nou en dan bel en hoor of jy nog lewe. Selfs vakansies. Daar is ander wat ek van weet wat nie so sterk is soos ek nie en hulle het weer in die “dumps” [*sic*] beland. Dis baie hartseer... (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

*George experienced extreme loneliness after an abrupt ending of social support from the social worker despite regular contact from his side with the previous housemother:

“Sometimes” [*sic*] voel ek alleen. Ek mis dit om my vriende om my te hê. Die “social worker” [*sic*] bel my ook nie. Ek sou graag wou hê sy moet net bietjie “worry” [*sic*] oor my en my nie so los nie, sodat ek nie so alleen voel nie. Dis hoekom ek somtyds alleen sit en stil is, want ek is nie gewoond aan hier buite nie. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

The same theory that was applicable to lack of social skills and knowledge, where the participants felt their skills of coping with stressful situations were lacking, is valid for this situation. Again, these feelings of problem appraisal and their support system being inadequate, led the state care leavers to withdrawal and a negative emotional state.

*Angelique, however, had a positive story in that she still had constant contact with her housemother. She felt that, if she really had serious problems (materialistic problems), she could ask her for help. Here is one of her experiences: “Ek het vir my huisma *[sic]* gesê ek sukkel. Ek het regtig gevoel soos ‘n kinderhuiskind. ‘n Weggooikind. Ek het verskriklik baie gesukkel!” (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

However, when she needed to talk to someone about negative feelings (social support), this is what she said:

Ek was so teleurgesteld [about the way people were treating her at work]. Ek was so hartseer en alleen. Ek kon met niemand, niemand praat nie. Ek het nie geweet met wie nie, want mens wil ook nou nie net die hele tyd by die kinderhuis of by my huisma *[sic]* kla nie. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

*Angelique often came back to something she spoke about earlier. She mentioned her feelings about social support again:

Ek kan nie met my sussies praat nie... Hulle het ook genoeg van hulle eie “worries” *[sic]*. Daar was altyd my huisma *[sic]*, maar mens kan nie die hele tyd net kla nie. Nou is ek alleen. Ek wens daar kon net iemand kom om my te help. Ek voel soms ek wil net moed opgee op die lewe. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

Finally on this topic, *Peter summarised everybody’s feelings quite well. After experiencing problems at his first work where he stole some money, his boss, although she fired him, arranged for him to receive therapy with a psychologist for a limited time, which she paid for. It also seems from his interviews that he has quite regular contact with other state care leavers. About social support, he said:

Maybe, if someone was there from the home to walk me through the time I didn’t know how to get out with my money to live the way I thought I should, I would not have gotten burnt so much *[sic]*. But “ja” *[sic]*, I also know the social workers are too busy to

worry about us out here as well. It's just so suddenly, man! Suddenly, after being so absolutely dependent and having everything put out in strict rules and structures... Then the sun rises again and there's *nothing!* You are on your own, boy! No advice. No support. No questions can be answered. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

Although most of the state care leavers experienced a traumatic, abrupt ending and total lack of social support, it was important to see that they nevertheless had sympathy with the situation causing the problem. Mostly they experienced the problem as the social workers being too busy to attend to their needs. They do not call it that, but their experiences are that of rejection, which would have the same negative effect on identity as discrimination mentioned earlier (Stein, 2006). In Chapter 8, the author makes some recommendations concerning these experiences of the state care leavers to counteract their negative experience of leaving the children's home without any social support.

Hepworth and Larsen (1993) mention the needs of school leavers in general from a social work point of view. They define social support from family, friends and professionals as a crucial emotional need. Not one of these needs is properly in place in case of the state care leavers because of various reasons such as their problematic background, discrimination, lack of finances for professional help, and a general lack of resources to get to help – should it be available.

Although it was mentioned in Chapter 3, it is important to repeat the theory of Lamborn and Steinberg (1993). They argue that a poor relationship between the caregiver and the adolescent results in negative “psychological development and adjustment” (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993, p. 495). The interview with *Angelique (personal interview, June 20, 2005) applies and is important in that it noted the correlation between the level of autonomy she experienced herself (as opposed to her sisters) and her relationship between herself and the children's home (housemother) after leaving. According to Stein (2005), this also correlates with better self-esteem, which is one of the

factors important to the development of resilience.

These feelings of yearning for social support are repeated in the experiences of state care leavers from previous phenomenological studies. One state care leaver in the study of Martin and Jackson (2002, p. 124) said: "I needed someone there for me and to praise me when I did something right... there was no positive reinforcement, there is hardly any at all...".

When looking at the literature review, it is important to note the correlation between the loss of social support and identity (Stein, 2006)(they do not feel that they belong), intimacy (they did not learn from experience the value of continued bonds) and the importance of normal and gradual emotional separation from primary caregivers that Fleming and Adolph (1986) mention, for the healthy development of the late adolescent into young adulthood. This should illuminate sudden loss of social support as an aspect that needs serious attention in future for developmental purposes of the late adolescent state care leaver.

Although it is true that the participants experienced much trauma with the abrupt ending of social bonds, each participant that had left the children's home four years or more before the time of the interviews, had built up a new social support system within the first two years after leaving. It did, however, come with many painful experiences (influencing their trust and development), which could have been prevented.

It seems from the experience of *Kathryn (personal interview, September 10, 2004) that ongoing social support does have a positive influence on the appraisals that the state care leaver makes of situations. It seems to have given her a resilience to seek out the benefit from her unhappy experiences. This was also evident in the experience of *George, who was happy as long as he still had contact with the housemother. However, *George's accumulated experience was not sufficient, since he had only left the children's home at the time of the interview less than one year before. He therefore, did not have enough time for reflection to find the meaning of this

connection still in place in his development. He only revealed that it was of great importance to him and that he experienced it as the one stable experience (except for his stable work in which he was happy) in his life at that point in time.

New social support in the form of an opposite sex relationship seems from the experiences of *Kathryn (personal interview, September 10, 2004) and *J.J. (personal interview, September 29, 2004 and personal interview, May 22, 2005) to have a very positive effect on the adaptation of the state care leaver into bigger society – provided that the relationship has some stability. Unfortunately, in the case of *Kathryn a year later, as well as in several of the other state care leavers' experiences, their reflections on relationships with the opposite sex contained some negative experiences. This rather seems to be the norm (refer to intimacy later on in this chapter).

Previously, the theory of Stroebe et al. (2002) was mentioned, relating leaving the home to the cognitive stress theory. It was explained that individuals experiencing a severe stressor (relocation), who lack resources (social support), "...would be unable to cope with the demands of the new situation...." (Stroebe, et al., 2002, p. 151) - referring not only to work or study environment and demands, but also socially and psychologically. This strongly correlates with the theory of acculturation as earlier discussed by Segal et al. (1999), as well as the behaviour/experiences expressed in the next paragraph. It is extremely important to take note of this theory, especially in one's attempt to better understand the high drop-out rate under state care leavers at tertiary level. This could also be a possible topic for future research.

In the experience of all the participants that still had contact with the children's home, the contact with the housemother was experienced as the most positive. In these cases, the state care leavers did not mind to contact the housemother from their side. On the other hand, the contact with social workers was experienced as very traumatic (associated with anger and finally acceptance) as a result of the sudden ending of support and no apparent interest in their daily coping in adapting to society. This could be attributed to

two reasons, namely unrealistic expectations because of the previous role the social worker played in their lives; as well as the heavy load of work on the shoulders of social workers in the children's home already. The absence of a sufficient follow-up programme or social support system provided for the state care leavers made these preventable feelings more traumatic.

The state care leavers experienced psychological stress over the poor relationship with their place of origin when leaving the children's home and in particular the social worker. This was found in all the interviews. It was, however, important to see *Kathryn's change of attitude towards the children's home when she changed to another social worker and her contact with the home improved drastically. This shows the importance of a positive contact from the social worker's side for the development of the state care leaver with his or her adaptation and coping in society. It almost seemed as if, after that incidence of positive contact, *Kathryn could better cope with her environment and developed more confidently in her identity, since she felt that she had a secure contact with a primary caregiver.

Positive self-image with the state care leaver, according to Stein (2005) is closely related with success in social networking, specifically supportive links with former carers.

Consequently, one of the recommendations the researcher would make, would be that the housemothers are encouraged to keep contact with the school leavers on a regular basis for at least two years, alternatively serving as a communication link between the state care leaver and the social worker.

7.2.4 Lack of Trust

This seems to be a general problem in the relationships with society outside the children's home. The experience shared by *Henry explains the feeling well: "Behalwe vir oom *Leon-hulle is daar 'n algemene houding dat jy gaan misluk. Seker oor jy 'n kinderhuiskind was. Daaroor vertrou ek niemand meer nie. Dis net te seer om te vertrou." (*Henry, personal interview, September 17,

2004)

***Mary, after her very traumatic ordeals with life outside the children's home, expressed her feelings about trusting a few times:**

Ek soek nie meer 'n man nie. En die polisie. Ons is geleer ons moet hulle vertrou en nou is dit hulle wat my lewe opgemors [*sic*] het.

Ek is nou skrikkerig vir mense. Ek vertrou niemand meer nie. Is ek verkeerd?

Ek het my beste gegee en wou die beste van my lewe maak om die mense by die kindershuis trots te maak op my! En toe kom die mense van die wêreld hier buite die kindershuis, wat ek geglo het ons in die kindershuise sit om ons te beskerm, en hulle vernietig alles wat ek gedroom en geglo het! Ek is meer as teleurgesteld. Ek is woedend kwaad. Ek het in die kindershuis geleer om te vertrou net om hier buite te kom en te *voel* dat jy niemand kan vertrou nie.
 (*Mary, personal interview, January 29, 2005)

While ***Mary** was talking about trust, she often wiped away a tear. It was obvious from her non-verbal communication that it was a hard lesson for her to learn that she could not trust. It seemed as if, in contrast with the others who used distrust as a coping mechanism, ***Mary** was prepared to trust. This made the pain for her even worse. ***Peter** explained this process of learning to use distrust as a coping mechanism better in his own words:

I guess I do have a trusting issue. I don't think if you come from a children's home you can say that you trust anybody or you always see the good in people. You must remember that the people that should have taught us to trust are the ones that hurt us most – our parents. Maybe not for everybody, but at least for me it is. And then, when you are in the children's home they still promise you they will come and visit and so on. And then you find yourself sitting outside on a Friday afternoon when everybody has gone to their weekend families and wait for someone you really believe is going to come. You are so excited. And then, when it gets dark and you are still sitting there alone and you start getting hungry. Then you know *again* they broke a promise. You

just must stop trusting people if you don't want to get hurt. You learn that quick-quick. It's pain that teaches us the most lessons in life.

...You want to trust again, but the first time you get burnt, you just go back to that thing that works for you: If you don't wanna *[sic]* get hurt, you must stop trusting people! Your boss of course you have to trust, because otherwise you get sacked *[sic]*. And your girlfriend too. If she finds out the truth [about him coming from a children's home], they think you are hiding other stuff as well and then it's all over anyway. But the others I don't tell are maybe because I don't care to lose them. You just keep on losing people in your life the whole time anyway. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

After the interviewer asked *Peter to explain more about losing people in his life, and how that affected his trust, he explained what happened in his life. He ended by saying that he probably will not marry. When the interviewer asked him what it has to do with him not trusting people, he answers "Ag' *[sic]*, to tell you the truth, I don't trust anyone enough [to marry]. I'm sick of getting hurt. I want someone to love me yes, but when they start breaking promises I get scared." (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

If one looks at the contents of the experiences, it seems that state care leavers experience that society's discrimination is responsible for their lack of trust. Added to this, their insight into their experiences is also that they use their lack of trust as a coping mechanism. Whichever way one looks at it, lack of trust has an influence on the development of state care leavers' relationship with society. It especially has a negative influence on the late adolescent state care leavers' intimate relationships, since they do not trust enough to give an efficient degree of self-disclosure and openness, which, according to Monsour (in Fischer, et al., 1996), is necessary for the developmental task of intimacy in late adolescence and young adulthood.

It further seems that a preventable negative cycle of events is present in the development of the state care leaver – best illustrated by using Riegel's paradigm. According to Riegel's paradigm (1976), every contact between

adolescents and society has an influence on their development. Each dimension of interaction constantly interacts with each other, bringing forward questions, change and more importantly, it brings transition into the life cycle of the individual – influencing development. Taking a lack of trust, discrimination and serious loss of social support into consideration in this process makes it clear that the late adolescent state care leaver and their development into young adulthood cannot be unscathed. In the process their development is affected in a negative way. Not only because these experiences are teaching them the wrong coping mechanisms, but also because of the influence on their sense of self. This finding was also mentioned by Stein (2006). He also states that it influences their development in such a way that it prolongs their stages of development.

7.2.5 Feelings of Loneliness

In speaking of his deepest emotions, *George shared more about his feelings of loneliness than any of the others.

The others also experienced the feeling that they did not fit in. They feel different from “the rest” and had no one to talk to that could understand their fears and pains.

A note of importance here is that *George was at the time of the interview still a late adolescent and his feelings were still very real to him. His feelings illuminate the pressure the state care leavers experience suddenly being on their own with expectations they feel they are not ready to face alone yet and nobody to talk to:

“Sometimes” *[sic]* voel ek alleen. Ek mis dit om my vriende om my te hê. Die “social worker” *[sic]* bel my ook nie. Ek sou graag wou hê sy moet net bietjie “worry” *[sic]* oor my en my nie so los nie, sodat ek nie so alleen voel nie. Dis hoekom ek somtyds alleen sit en stil is... Dis moeilik. Ek kry swaar. Dis nie lekker nie. Ek pas nêrens in nie. By die kindershuis ja, maar da *[sic]* is nou mos nie meer my plek nie *[sic]*. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

*Henry put it in such a way that the reader can place him or herself in his shoes:

Vrees. ...Kan jy die eerste dag onthou toe jy hoërskool toe is? As dit nie 'n lekker ervaring is nie, wil jy teruggaan na waar jy veilig voel. ...vir 'n kinderhuiskind is dit nie moontlik nie. 'n Ander kind kan huis toe gaan, maar 'n kinderhuiskind het nie 'n veilige hawe nie. Jy dobber rond soos 'n bootjie. So wat doen jy? Jy kan na individue toe teruggaan, maar vir hoe lank? ...Jy hoort nie by hulle nie. Jy hoort eintlik nêrens nie.
 (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

In the discussion of the theory of acculturation in Table 4.1 (p. 33), behavioural shifts are mentioned, containing cultural conflict. This includes incompatibility and intergroup difficulties. It is understandable from the experiences of the state care leavers described in the study, that they do have experiences of incompatibility and intergroup difficulties (especially when one refers to discrimination). It is also clear and understandable that the state care leaver can then experience loneliness.

In Table 4.1 (p. 33), Segal et al. (1999) explain the next step after intergroup difficulties as being acculturative stress (presented as problem appraisal, stressors and stress phenomena such as anxiety), which has been given attention earlier in this chapter as being present. When acculturative stress is present, psychopathology presents (including problems, crises and pathological phenomena such as depression). Segal et al. (1999) clarify this paradigm by illustrating that an individual would withdraw or separate himself from others once he experiences adaptation into a new culture as overwhelming.

*Peter also shared his feelings on the matter of loneliness, not fitting in and needing someone to talk to.

...but you feel so deserted! I feel so very alone out here sometimes, man. ...I feel like a stranger in this world sometimes that has been thrown away. "Ag ja" [*sic*], they tell you they will be there for you, but when you phone they are always busy. And you know it's

really always in the back of your head that they will get irritated with you if you phone and ask questions. ...I started missing my parents, but I visited once or twice and saw that I don't fit in there either. You don't fit in anywhere, really. You feel like a drifter. ...You have nowhere to go on Christmas or Easter. No family. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

*Kathryn repeated the yearning for having someone to talk to and specifically correlates this feeling with discrimination:

...met groot "terdo's" [*sic*] by die gemeente het jy ook maar gevoel die ander kinders "check" [*sic*] die kinderhuiskinders uit. So ja, dit het toe seker al seergemaak om apart gesien te word van die "ander" [shows inverted commas with her fingers] kinders. Ag, daar het almal so gevoel, so mens kon met mekaar praat, maar hier is ek alleen. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

Later *Peter touched on the topic again:

So you tell me where do we now actually fit in? Who do you talk to...? They just won't understand. They say sometimes they had it just as bad to leave the house after school, but "ag" [*sic*] come on! They still have contact with their parents. If they fail, okay, they might have it bad as well, but I was taken out of a situation to be protected. When I fail, I am forced back into that situation or otherwise on the street. Nobody to fall back on, really. That scares me. It makes me maybe angry too. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

*Peter said that it was this fear that drove them to succeed once they were outside the children's home, but it was also this same fear that caused them anger. His feelings of feeling lonely are again quite apparent in the next expression of how he experienced leaving the children's home directly after school:

It was hard. Very hard. I wished then that I had someone to talk to. Someone who knew me since the children's home. Someone who could just say it's okay. You will survive. Just make your choices yourself, then no-one can influence you. But there

wasn't anybody. Nobody. I was alone, man! (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

*Peter gave himself a “drifter” label and all the others also experienced that they did not fit in and subsequently felt lost and lonely outside the children’s home. This surely affects the development of their identity, including wasting psychological energy on feelings of rejection and loneliness when it should be spent on normal development and adaptation.

In Chapter 3 of this study, it was noted that some theorists describe development as the progressive growth and transformation in the thoughts and behaviours of an individual over time. One of the factors that were mentioned as an influence on this development was environment (society). De la Rey et al. (1997) explain environmental factors as the individual’s experience of the outside world. They believed that environmental factors ultimately determine whether the individual’s potential would be actualised.

Additionally, the traumatic experiences mentioned in the previous themes caused most of these state care leavers to develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, for instance being untruthful about their background. Most of them experienced that lies about their past spared them being discriminated against, which only reinforced their unhealthy coping mechanisms, influenced their development of identity and subsequently also influenced their relationships negatively.

7.2.6 Lies About Their Past

This was also a common finding in international phenomenological research (Frampton, 2002). *Kathryn (personal interview, September 10, 2004) argued that she did it to protect herself from the pain of rejection, being treated differently and being stigmatised. Her friend asked her what she should say when people ask about her past, so she told her friend to tell others she came from a foster home in Pretoria.

At the end of the first interview, *Kathryn admitted to lying about her past and stressed her reason for doing so: “Ek jok net nog steeds oor waar ek vandaan kom soms, want ek is moeg gebaklei teen al die stigmas oor die kinderhuiskind.” (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004).

*Angelique also said: “Ek stres net baie dat dit teen my kan tel [dat ek uit die kinderhuis uit kom] as iemand weet. Dis hoekom ek nie vertel nie.” (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

This experience was commonly found, namely that the state care leavers did not have the psychological skills to deal with rejection or discrimination because of the stigmas attached to their past. When the recommendations are made in the last chapter, more attention will be given to this topic.

The interviewer had a conversation with *Peter about the reason he lied about his past. An earlier part of the conversation was included for ease of understanding the meaning the state care leaver gives to his experience of lying about his past. It is also important that he became conscious that it was his coping mechanism.

*Peter: And then you have those that label you as if they can see in the future that you are going to mess up sooner or later. It is bad – depending on *who* it is, but sometimes also good, because you get motivated to prove them wrong! You know? Study harder. Work harder. But it kills your soul in the end because nobody is without mistakes and sometime or another those people laugh behind your back.

Interviewer: How do you handle this?

*Peter: I just don't say anymore. I don't ever say anymore that I come from a children's home. I make friends easy [*sic*], so I just ask so many questions that the wrong questions don't come my way. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

*J.J. (personal interview, September 29, 2004) lied to a friend about his background and in the process lost the friend when he found out that *J.J. came from a children's home. This might sound extreme, but such is the reality of the experiences of the state care leaver.

A certain degree of self-disclosure and openness is necessary for the healthy development of the late adolescent, in order to be able to form a positive social support system as well as healthy intimate relationships. However, their experiences are that of being judged because of their background, which they had no control over. Should they be open about who they are and where they come from, they then again face the fear of rejection or being discriminated against. This causes the late adolescent state care leaver to fear rejection and thus use lying as a coping mechanism to not experience discrimination. It is a vicious circle of behaviour, which has no benefits for either of the parties involved, since lying, as a coping mechanism, is detrimental to any relationship.

From the previous experiences, it is clear that there seems to be a lack of psychological resources in the experiences of the state care leavers. This lack of resources also influences their development negatively (Stein, 2005). The answer is therefore to build on the resilience of the state care leavers *before* they leave the children's home.

7.2.7 First Hostel (Residence) Experiences

Overall, the participants had a feeling of not being prepared for what they were about to encounter. Their expectations were not realistic and their experiences very closely related to the previous themes in these findings, namely discrimination, lack of knowledge and lack of social support. Disappointment was more present in their first residential experiences than with other experiences mentioned.

*Kathryn's expectation seems to have been that it would be difficult at first to adapt, but that she would be treated like any other student. Her expectations

being too high, resulted in disappointment and anger. This was her first experience - according to her - of discrimination in the residence, which was very painful. Her sense of self and trust was severely influenced by this ordeal.

Wel, ja, die HK [*sic*] [house committee] het in my eerste jaar na die studentedekaan gegaan en gevra hoe hulle my moet hanteer. Dit was nie lekker dat hulle my bespreek het nie. [From here on she speaks much louder and the feeling of the researcher is that she experiences anger. Her emotions are very clear on the subject.] Jissie [*sic*!] Wat is ek? 'n Hond of iets? Ek was woedend vir hulle! Hy was die hoogste vlak. Hoekom het hulle nie na die huisvader toe gegaan nie. Of eerder – hoekom het hulle my nie gevra nie! Dit sou beter gewees het. Ek voel verraai. ...Dis asof hulle gaan vra hoe om 'n krimineel in die koshuis te hanteer – so asof ek 'n probleem gaan veroorsaak. ...In hulle oë was ek die kinderhuiskind en nie die....presteerder op skool, hoofmeisie....nie. Nee, hulle verkies om 'n "label" [*sic*] om my nek te hang vir die universiteit se topbestuur om te sien! ...Die dekaan het toe gesê hulle moet my nes die ander hanteer. Wooooow [*sic*!] [She widens her eyes and waves her arms in the air to show exaggeration.] "Big surprise!" [*sic*]. Ek sou hulle presies dieselfde kon vertel het. [She smirks and shakes her head.]. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004).

Resentment such as *Kathryn's about being singled out is also found in previous research done by Martin and Jackson (2002). Further, to *Kathryn, the main problems were lack of social support, weekends, finances and holidays. As a residential problem, these factors were also highlighted by the participants in the research done by Martin and Jackson (2002). Social support has already been mentioned and will therefore not be repeated. *Kathryn's experience of holidays is also mentioned in "personal experiences" later in the findings. Following is her experience of weekends and finances in her first experiences in the residence:

[Ek kan nie] ...saampraat oor alledaagse goed soos naweke huis toe gaan en gesinslewe en sulke goed nie. Hulle het ook naweke huis toe gegaan en ek nie. Dit laat mens baie dink. Basies was die probleem sosiaal gewees.

Dis nou behalwe vir finansieel. Kom ons begin sommer by die begin van die eerste jaar [She looks up at the ceiling as if to think for a moment.]! Skutblikke [*sic*] dit, klein goedjies hier en daar betaal, moet "take-aways" [*sic*] koop, want jy kry nie tyd vir kos maak nie. Dit was skokkend om te hanteer op daai [*sic*] stadium hoe baie geld jy kry en hoe niks dit eintlik is. Jy moet leer aanpas by die nuwe sosiale reëls en goed en dan nog "worry" [*sic*] oor hoe om met jou geld uit te kom ook (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004).

About holidays, *J.J. said he paid the residence to stay in over holidays, otherwise he did not know where else he would have gone to. At that stage, his holiday family moved to *Durban, so he had nowhere else to go.

The most frequent feeling experienced by state care leavers who went on to study after school, was the disappointment of expectations. The expectations differed in a variety of ways, but one expectation that stood out was to fall into a fixed routine in which they could study easier. Here are a few of these experiences:

O, ons het baie streng dissipline by die kindershuis gehad. Dis seker te verstane, nê. Hier [in the residence] is dit glad nie so nie. Ek het nie selfdissipline gehad nie, want roetine was afgedwing in die kindershuis en tydens die dooptyd [*sic*]. Ha, ja! Toe die ander "relax" [*sic*] oor die doop oor is, toe begin ek stres oor ek nou op my eie moet aanpas. Dit was 'n groot aanpassing en het nogal baie van my emosionele energie gemors... (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004).

Die koshuislewe was vir my 'n groot skok. ...Daar is geen stabiliteit nie. By die kindershuis was daar altyd stiptelike roetine. Selfs toe jy in matriek is. Ek het koshuis toe gegaan omdat dit my roetine moes gee, sodat ek beter moes leer. Toe is dit net mooi die teenoorgestelde. Jy moet die hele tyd koshuisdinge doen vir groepsbou en geesbou en alles. Dit was vir my 'n groot skok en het definitief my klaspunte beïnvloed. Verally as 'n eerstejaar moet jy dit en dit bywoon en daar is nie so iets soos nee vir 'n antwoord nie. ...Dis net... 'n kindershuiskind moet seker tien keer harder werk omdat jy

nie ondersteuning het nie (*J.J., personal interview, October 3, 2004).

Finally, there is *Henry's experience, which was also one of disappointment because of unrealistic expectations. He specifically also mentioned the fact that he had nobody to talk to about it as an additional negative experience. This made him feel extremely lonely.

In my eerste jaar het ek nie daarvan gehou dat die seniors *[sic]* my "rondshunt" *[sic]* nie. Ek was goed behandel in die hoërskool oor my sportprestasies. Toe word ek skielik oordonder deur die seniors *[sic]*. Ek dink wat dit so vreeslik hard (moeilik) maak is dat daar niemand is om vir jou voor die tyd te sê dit gaan beter word of dis net tydelik of jy gaan nog vriende word met hierdie mense nie. Jy dobber rond soos 'n bootjie tussen mense wat jy voel gee 'n duiwel om vir jou en niemand om te vra wat gaan aan nie. (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

The first negative residential experiences strongly relate to the previously described experiences of discrimination, lack of knowledge and lack of social support.

Perhaps the words of Frampton (2002) (national chairperson of the Care Leavers Association in Great Britain) from the literature study describe the feelings of the state care leavers best in these experiences when he says: "We care leavers are not ugly ducklings. We are fine swans. We may not have had a nest but we still learned to fly" (Frampton, 2002, p. 24).

*Kathryn said that her energy could have been used better for her overall development if she had more knowledge and skills to adapt easier. This is an important insight to take note of, since the knowledge should guide psychologists to better understand, so they can better prepare the late adolescent state care leaver in future.

The author hopes that scrutinising the mentioned experiences would help with a better understanding of these late adolescent state care leavers, so that in future client services or student services bureaus at universities and technical

colleges can better prepare to tend to the unique needs of these students.

7.2.8 Experiencing Acculturation: Collectivism versus Individualism

An important finding was that it seems that state care leavers experience leaving the children's home and entering the dominant society as a cultural change (acculturation). They experienced it as a move from collectivism to individualism. A few extractions are given from the interviews: "Hulle glo ook mos nie in die enkeling daar nie. Jy lewe in 'n groep en as jy uit die groep is, dan weet hulle seker nie meer hoe om jou te hanteer nie." (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004).

And...

Dinge in die kindershuis is baie kollektief gedoen. Jy het nooit self kans gehad om te leer om belangrike besluite self te neem nie. Dis VIR jou geneem. Deur die huismoeder, die maatskaplike werker, reëls wat daar is sodat almal goed kan saamwerk. Die individu tel nie. Nou skielik moet ek self besluite neem en foute maak seer. Baie seer. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

For *George, however, the experience of moving from one collectivistic culture to another considerably different collectivistic culture, was extremely confusing.

Ek ken nie die goed wat hierdie mense doen nie al is hulle vel se kleur dieselfde as myne. Ek is ander maniere geleer. Ek wonder watter maniere is die regte – myne wat ek geleer het of hulle se maniere. Ek wonder baie. Ek weet nie of ek pas nie. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

Finally, the experience of *Peter takes the reader into the life experiences of a black South African state care leaver. Although he was making jokes in between, the interviewer was constantly aware that this was a serious problem in the South African context of the state care leaver.

...the Ndebeles don't marry outside their culture. My girlfriend was Ndebele. The sangoma is important, this culture does this and that culture does that. ...You must live it to understand it. My girlfriend had something in her handbag, because she believed it would stop the "tsotsis" [*sic*] from robbing her. I laughed at her. That was a big mistake. You see, we grow up with white people in the children's home. There is no exposure to our cultures. We don't know this stuff and it makes you feel like an outsider! This is really bad, because now we come outside and we don't fit in. ...They don't understand us and I don't understand them. ...I can't ask them, because then they know where I come from. Like with my girlfriend I feel stupid! ...This is a very, very, big difficult thing that you *must* tell the people that must help the children that must still come out. Life is very, very, very different out here. ...Maybe they must get us weekend people that are from our culture. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

The author refers the reader to *Peter's experience of making friends (in this chapter) as well, since he repeated the above feelings in several instances.

These experiences speak of collectivism versus individualism (Castillo, 1997) in two different subcultures in society and even the acculturation of two totally different collectivistic subcultures in society. For this reason and more reasons discussed under the heading of acculturation, the author considers acculturation as an applicable theory if combined with developmental theory in better understanding the experiences of the state care leaver.

7.3 Findings and Interpretations: Different Experiences Among the Participants in this Study

7.3.1 Intimacy

Erikson (1968) was mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, explaining that the choice of a life partner is only possible when a secure self-identity has been accomplished in adolescence. The mistakes *Peter and *Kathryn mention about choices in close relationships of the state care leaver are self-explanatory in their experiences, as well as in their personal reflection on their past experiences. It also explains the applicability of Erikson's (1968) theory to the state care leaver's experience. According to these phenomenological

experiences, the state care leavers often makes mistakes in their choices of intimate partners. The reasons for this will not be discussed in this study, because cause and effect is not investigated in a phenomenological study. However, the developmental theory of Erikson (1968) provides a better understanding of why these intimate relationships do not last or are detrimental to the psychological well-being of the state care leaver. It becomes clear in the reflections of *Peter and *Kathryn as seen in the following interviews. *Peter related the following insights into what he saw happening to his friends:

All the guys and - let's call them ladies – from [children's home's name] I still talk to have the same problem, hey [*sic*]. If they look for a boyfriend, then them [*sic*] ladies always end up being hit or something. Or the guy is so poor that he can't scratch his bum with a penny [*sic*]. Or the guys, man! They all date ladies much older than them or otherwise the "easier" [shows inverted commas with his fingers] girls. ...The chicks [*sic*] from [children's home's name] who are older or have babies from the woman-beaters now hate men! (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

It is interesting that *Peter referred to the experiences of his friends and not to his own experiences. He kept a degree of distance from his insights – maybe in a process of looking at himself. Later in the interview it seemed as if he was moving closer to his own fears and showed better insights when he reflected on his own intimate relationships. Here is an example:

...to tell you the truth, I don't trust anyone enough. I'm sick of getting hurt. I want someone to love me yes, but when they start breaking promises I get scared. My father is stuck to my mother. And what good did that do him? He can't get away from her. I don't want to be there! Maybe some day. I don't know. Just not right now. I just see too much all the wrong choices the other guys from the children's home are making. They mostly look for someone to look after them I think. That's all I can think, because they are making stupid mistakes! Or they want to prove that they *can* make someone love them that are as difficult as their parents. It's just so complicated.

It all comes down to your biggest fears or expectations when you come out of the children's home in the first place. So someone to hold your hand and to show you the ropes out here is something we all look for first thing. And then you sort of have the expectation that someone is going to look after you in some way or another. ...we want to prove to ourselves that we are good enough to be loved and cared for. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

*Peter spoke in the underlined parts of himself, but used the second person. The discussion of collectivism versus individualism showed that when *Peter referred to his personal pain in intimate relationships and the insights into it, he was in a process of trying to understand why his personal intimate relationships were not lasting. His process of understanding makes the better understanding of the conscious thought process of the state care leaver as a late adolescent an important learning curve in this study. He seemingly moved from what was happening to others to what was happening to himself and how he reflected on it with his background in mind.

*Kathryn gave some insightful thoughts on her own experiences in the second interview that was held with her on June 12, 2005.

I had a boyfriend from end of last year until now recently. Before that also, but only had the relationship for two months. The first one started off by telling me that I should stop studying and start making a living. We had a lot of friends and visited a lot, but it ended up sour, because he hit me on two occasions when he got drunk. I left him. He kept on harassing me, so the lady that walked a road with me since the children's home helped me to make a case of battering against him. He left the country, because he's originally from Greece. ...The relationship was good as long as he was not drunk and what was nice is that I was still in res *[sic]* [residence] at that time. So it was nice to go study there at his house over weekends and visit. It was like I had a home to go to.

...it was nice also because I felt like I was looked after. The money we get from the trust isn't so much you know, so it was nice to party and go places and get nice clothes and so on and so on, because he paid for it. I admit now

that I enjoyed at that stage being taken care of. That's probably why it was so difficult to get away the first time he slapped me. And maybe because he made me believe that I deserved it. ...She [the lady] told me there was *absolutely no* excuse for a man to hit you and told me to get out of there, because it is going to get worse and not better. ...She was shocked [when she saw me] to see the marks in my neck where he strangled me and took me to the police station to make a case against him. She also gave me a new sim card for my cell phone so he could not bother me anymore. Now that is something I would never have thought of and that made me think! Why not? I thought it was probably because we learnt from each other at the children's home to fight for ourselves. So we learn to fight the *nasty* way and not in a *clever* way.

But I also then realised that my two choices of boyfriends so far were every time when I wanted to be taken care of. The last one was when I felt vulnerable and hurt from a previous relationship and it ended like this. I keep on making the wrong choices. ...it seems many of my friends from the children's home also end up with abusers.

...Well, in January I left the residence and got money from my holiday people [*sic*] to put a deposit down for a flat. I spent it on buying furniture and ended up having no choice but move in with him [the latest boyfriend], because I had to be close to the university. It went well, until just the other day when I went into a flat with a girlfriend from the university. ...one evening, when I asked him to take me home because I had to hand in something the next day to my professor, he refused. I cried, because my studies are important to me. ...He hit me in my stomach. I went hysterical and in the process kicked a crack in the front window of his car. When he stopped at a robot, I tried to jump out. ...He pulled me back and hit me through the face. ...The next day I went to the police and made a case against him as well. Later, I heard, he made a case against me for the damaging of property. It sounds so dramatic, but what was I to do?

Well, and here I sit. Two boyfriends that hit me and I know I'm not the only one making those mistakes. ...I wish I knew what to look out for. I don't want to go

through this again. I just know that a guy looking after you financially is maybe not such a good idea. It's just difficult, because my money this year is even less. I don't come out every month and I know, I know how to budget [*sic*].
 (*Kathryn, June 12, 2005)

After she told of her experiences and her uncertainty when doing reflection, she shared her insights:

And what I got out of the thinking process is that I first have to be happy in myself before I can go into a relationship again. Eagles don't pare off until they are adults. I'm an adult in years, but I had to sort out things about my identity first. That's why I think I made the mistakes with the guys. I'm sorry to say, but I think I was just using them, like people helping the children's homes children sometimes can help without really loving.
 (*Kathryn, June 12, 2005)

Most authors prefer to define intimacy as a degree of self-disclosure and openness (Clark & Reis, 1988; Monsour in Fischer, et al., 1996; Montgomery, 1984). Fischer et al. (1996) also define intimacy as emotional closeness and a feeling of being cared for. In the experiences mentioned above, it is clear that state care leavers often have problems with trust and openness, and that their behaviour is affected greatly by previous discrimination. All of these influence their sense of self. They experience specifically that they are "behind" in their development in general when first entering into relationships. This makes sense when one looks at the description Feldman (2001) provides on intimacy and specifically when he refers to the different levels of self-disclosure.

Feldman (2001) describes intimacy as the degree of self-disclosure an individual is prepared to reveal. He distinguishes between two different kinds of self-disclosure, namely *descriptive self-disclosure* (people sharing facts about their lives) and *evaluative self-disclosure* (people communicating their feelings). Feldman (2001) states that the different types of self-disclosure are used in different contexts and lead to different levels of intimacy.

Feldman (2001) explains that descriptive self-disclosure is the type of self-

disclosure one gets in the beginning of a relationship. As the relationship progresses, the levels and depth of disclosure increase, leading to disclosing hidden or more personal material of the individual's life (evaluating self-disclosure). This is important concerning the experience of state care leavers, since lying about their background is common practice, according to the literature review done earlier, as well as the experiences already mentioned from interviews in this study. This would mean that their descriptive self-disclosure would already seem to them as evaluative self-disclosure, since they will be evaluated (and most of the time discriminated against). This places a lot of negative pressure on the development of intimacy in the life of the state care leaver.

Feldman (2001) also states that people sometimes cautiously present restricted amounts of information about themselves in a process of testing the reaction of the people they are in a relationship with. As the relationship progresses, the self-disclosure and related intimacy deepen or increase. Thus, it is important for late adolescent state care leavers in this whole process of development to feel comfortable with who they are so that they can feel comfortable with self-disclosure. This is more often than not the case as clearly visible in the experiences mentioned above.

However, some of their experiences were that of cultural learning only once they were in an intimate relationship and thus helping in the development of their identity achievement. This is also understandable according to the above-mentioned theory, since they found acceptance for who they are and where they come from.

Related to this experience, is that of making friends, which is the next theme.

7.3.2 Making friends

Most care leavers had experienced problems adapting and making new friends. *George's experience is probably the most relevant to use first, since he left the children's home not too long before the interview and reflected on

the experience directly after leaving the children's home:

Dit help baie dat ek naweke kan teruggaan kinderhuis toe. Hulle verstaan as ek teruggink oor my lewe. Die mense hier buite verstaan nie, so ek praat nie met hulle oor hoe ek voel as ek teruggink nie. Ek bly maar net stil. (*George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

It is also important to again look at the theory of Feldman (2001), which was mentioned above concerning self-disclosure and the influence it has on the development of close relationships. It is clear that *George has problems with self-disclosure and that it influences his personal relationships outside the children's home negatively.

*Angelique at first mentioned that she made friends easily and she also came across as a very pleasant person. However, later in the interview she expressed more than once that for one reason or another she seemed to struggle making friends at work. Here are her own words, so that the reader can understand her feelings of loneliness better:

Ai tannie, da's [*sic*] altyd meisies wat my nie "like" [*sic*] nie. Ek doen seker iets verkeerd wat ek seker nie eers van weet nie, want dis mos maar anders hier buite. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

Much later in the interview her attitude towards making friends turned considerably more positive, but also had the element of limited self-disclosure and probably was also the reason for her difficulty in making friends. However, she developed a coping mechanism in her process of reflecting on her life experiences. Here is her reflection on her experience:

Ek sê nie vir enigiemand ek kom van die kinderhuis af nie. Ek voel dit was *my* probleme. Ek kan gou vriende maak. Ek het op skool geleer. Ek het baie hard geleer en gewerk op skool, want mense hou van mense wat goed is. Ek bedoel nou presteer. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

She also tried to convey another coping mechanism she tried in the process to make friends outside the children's home: "Ek probeer maar altyd lyk of ek niks probleme het nie" (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005). Unfortunately, she does not seem to have the insight yet that this is counter-productive. For this reason, the researcher stresses the necessity of including the learning of social skills and helping the school leavers to find their own identity before leaving the children's home. Such a preventative programme for school leavers will empower them to make the process of making new friends a little less hard and traumatic.

Later in the interview, *Angelique tried to find meaning in her problems to make friends outside the children's home:

Die mense is anders hier buite, tannie. Die meisies hou nie van my nie. By die werk nou. Hulle voel ek is te sag of praat te lank en te mooi met die mense op die telefoon. Hulle is harde mense. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

The author finds the need to mention again the emotional experiences of the participants in Martin and Jackson's research (2002, p. 124). They experienced "...standing out amongst their peers as different or peculiar". The participants from Martin and Jackson's (2002) study also felt that they did not have the resources to mix with friends, including their clothing, transport, finances and more. These experiences were repeated with the state care leavers of the current study, as well as in the study of Biehal et al. (1995). Particularly in the experience of *Angelique and *Kathryn (mentioned earlier), the role that lack of resources played in making new friends was experienced as a serious problem.

Nou moet ek die hele tyd net dink, want ek hoor dit die hele tyd, hoe sleg is ek en dan huis toe en moet alleen gaan sit in daai [*sic*]vreeslike plek. My klere is my gordyne. Ek slaap op die vloer op n matras met 'n kombens wat krap. ...En hoe nooi mens nou vriende na so 'n plek toe? En ek het ook nie geld vir uitgaan nie. Dit was baie beter in die kindershuis. (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

*Peter repeats this lack of resources, lack of skills and the influence it had on making friends outside the children's home when he said in his own words: "You know, the kids from normal *[sic]* families know how to fit in. Obviously we don't have the clothes and the gear to impress and also not the skills they use to build relationships." (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

Later *Angelique again expressed her fears about her incapability to make friends at work and the influences it could have on her life: "Hulle [the rich colleagues she has at work] gaan laat ek my werk verloor. Hulle verstaan nie dat ek die werk meer nodig het as hulle nie." (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

*Peter had a meaningful and insightful discussion about his experiences with making new friends. According to him, it influenced his development considerably, since an intimate relationship seemed impossible to him with the knowledge and background that he had:

I make friends with white people now, because it is too difficult with the black people *[sic]*. The white people think more like us in the children's home, but also not so much. You see, the black people look after their own, but their own is family. So you are easily an outsider if you are not a family or a neighbour. So for me it's very difficult to make friends with black people *[sic]*, because I don't belong there. It's difficult. It really makes a difference in who you think you are. I think it is more difficult for the black kids *[sic]* that come out of the children's home, because we struggle longer to know where we fit in. One black woman, whose daughter I dated, asked me if I was in the mountain? The what? Yes, there are mountains in the Cape... She did not understand me and I did not understand her. I was rejected by the family right away. *Now* I know she was talking about the initiations. Now I also understand why she clicked her tongue and said something like: 'Stupid boy'. [He keeps quiet for a while, smiling and then suddenly he is serious again, saying the next sentence very loud.] *You're an outsider, man!* It's difficult. ...I don't know now who I'm going to marry, because I don't really fit anywhere. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

Others made friends, but felt with reflections on their experiences that they

had other emotional problems from the past, e.g. lack of trust standing between them and intimate relationships. Only when such issues have been dealt with, can the individual develop healthy relationships. Of importance in the following excerpt from the interview with *Kathryn, is her fear of rejection or being discriminated against. This is understandable when one looks at Feldman's (2001) statement that people sometimes test others in a relationship as to how much information they can reveal about themselves. The first time *Kathryn had success in passing the barrier of fear for rejection, was when she made friends with someone who had sympathy and understanding for her background and not judge her. This only real friend she experienced as being a true friend is, for interest's sake, a daughter of a social worker who previously worked with children from a children's home. For the first time she found acceptance in this friendship, because she was not discriminated against:

Weet jy, ek het aanhoudend begin dink "wat is fout met my" en "wat gaan ek nou weer verkeerd doen". Jy leef met 'n konstante vrees oor jou kop. Ek was ongelooflik bang hulle verwerp my. Dis seker maar "issues" *[sic]* van die verlede van 'n kindershuis kind. Dis sekerlik hoekom my en my ou en ander vriendinne se verhoudings nie gewerk het nie, want as mens bang is vir verwerping, doen mens "stupid" *[sic]* goed. Jy lewe nie sommer net nie. ...Jy weet – hoe kan mens in 'n verhouding wees as jy jousef nie kan gee nie. "Nevermind" *[sic]* dit. Wie gee jy in die verhouding? Watter lieg storie *[sic]* van jousef as jy bang is mense verwerp jou? (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

*Kathryn's last statement (underlined) is easily recognised and makes it more understandable for the reader when looking at the theory of Erikson (1968), namely that identity has to be achieved before intimacy; and, together with that, the statement of Feldman (2001), as well as various other authors (Chapter 3), namely that self-disclosure and openness are an important factor in an intimate relationship. *Kathryn continues:

Toe ek ophou begin "worry" *[sic]* oor die verwerping, toe is die vriendskappe beter. Maar ek vertrou maar nog steeds nie almal nie. ...Ek het nou 'n "nice" *[sic]* vriendin...

Ons is al twee jaar vriende. Ons baklei soms, maar dan is ons weer goed. Ten minste hanteer sy my nie anders as haar ander vriendinne nie. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

Pertaining to theory on identity in Chapter 3, it is acknowledged that adolescents need to mirror themselves as to how their peer group perceive them and include that in their assessment of an own identity. Should the state care leavers leave the children's home, lose contact with their peers and struggle to make new friends in a different subculture as has been seen in the examples mentioned above, it influences their total psychological development as well as their adaptation into society negatively.

It is clear from the themes (findings from this study) of making new friends, difficulty with intimacy, the experience of discrimination and lack of adequate skills, that the state care leavers developed coping mechanisms outside the children's home in order to be able to adapt to the problems they experienced in their dealings with society. Some are counter-productive (lying about their past has been mentioned) and some are productive.

7.3.3 Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms of individuals in general differ. This is no different for the experience of the state care leaver. Here is George's experience: "Ek werk lekker. Ek praat nie terug nie. Ek is so geleer. Ek werk lekker, maar ek wil net meer tyd hê om te oefen met die hardloop [He went on some sports tours while at school and seemed to have excelled in that regard]." (George, personal interview, September 29, 2004)

It would have been very good for the development of *George's identity to keep on with athletics, since it gave him a positive connection with other people in society. It would have made adaptation into society easier for him. However, he considered his work situation and residence as unpractical for him to continue with athletics. If he had internal motivation or the assertiveness and knowledge to contact the right people (he was at the time

working in the university gardens) or even only had contact with someone who could support him, this could have been different for *George.

*Henry also channelled his stress via sport. He adopted a life philosophy as well, which meant a lot to him:

...sport was nog altyd my redding. Dis 'n manier om jou woede se energie êrens in te sit in plaas van dwelms en drank. Dit het my gelukkig nooit geïnteresseer nie [the drugs and alcohol]. My huisvader... het eendag vir my gesê: "Jy alleen kan besluit wat jy van jou lewe maak [*sic*]." Dis nou nog my lewensfilosofie. (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004)

*Kathryn handles her internal turmoil by indulging in her studies. This could have been her coping mechanism learnt because of positive feedback (internally as well as externally) when she excelled academically at school. She consciously reflected on it as a coping mechanism:

...Ek het net harder "geswot" [*sic*] hoe kwater ek geword het. My frustrasie het my gedruk om hulle te wys! Akademies was ek "fine" [*sic*]. ...Ironies - Die vriende wat my gelos het oor hulle my geoordeel het, doen nou dieselfde dinge en nou vra hulle my raad. (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

*Angelique, without any uncertainty, mentioned her faith in the Lord, which carried her through the hardest times in her life. This is a healthy coping mechanism and probably also contributed to her predominantly positive outlook on life.

*Mary contributed the times she could cope with trauma to her relationship with her sister as a social support system. It seems in her case, in a black South African collectivistic system, that her family plays a very big role as a social support system in her coping with trauma. This is possible in her case, since her mother had rehabilitated from alcohol abuse. Otherwise, this is not possible for the average state care leaver. Despite this, however, *Mary was not spared psychological scars after her traumatic ordeals in society after

leaving the “sheltered” (Demont, 2002, p. 8) environment of the children’s home. This is also a theme that should be considered in the preventative measures taken to make the state care leavers separation from the children’s home easier.

*Peter is aware from previous experience that for him a healthy coping mechanism is finding insight by reflecting on life. He might not be aware of it, but from an outside point of view it was evident from the interview that this is currently his most predominant coping mechanism. The experience that forced him to find meaning in his life was getting into trouble. He gained insight that his getting into trouble was because of wrong perceptions he had, as well as wrong coping mechanisms. Here is his experience:

She [his boss – after firing him for stealing money] sent me to a psychologist who helped me out [*sic*]. ...She discovered that I had wrong perceptions and then I was forced to take a good hard look at what is real and what is dreams and what the weekend parents wanted to show me was just that they wanted to give me a little bit of a good time. (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005)

In spite of his insight, *Peter also uses unhealthy coping mechanisms, for instance lying about his past and not trusting people in order to prevent painful experiences of discrimination and other experiences already mentioned earlier. It seems from all the state care leavers’ experiences that these unhealthy coping mechanisms of lying and distrust are adopted in order to adapt and develop a new identity in the society that discriminates against them.

And finally, *J.J. (personal interview, September 29, 2004) said he hit the guys giving him trouble, but only when they were alone, because he is built too small to tackle a group. Apart from that, he also uses distrust and lying about his background as unhealthy coping mechanisms. *J.J. is one of the participants who do not have any contact with the children’s home he resided in. He does it consciously, because he experiences unresolved anger towards them. This is a flight coping mechanism, which is also counter-productive.

Currently (from a short interview in 2005), it seems as if *J.J. now focuses on the development of his career and success in his relationship with his fiancée as a coping mechanism he has learnt from the society he has adapted to. However, it is still of major concern that he experiences much anger towards the children's home and people that discriminate against him. Anger management would be a positive preventative method to implement in J.J.'s case. He mentioned that he was like that at school already, which means that preventative intervention would have been possible.

It is clear from the experiences above, that both positive as well as negative coping mechanisms develop in the late adolescent state care leavers' experience with society. Teaching them effective coping mechanisms or skills before leaving state care would be advantageous. Helping them to develop resilience would help them to use it effectively (Stein, 2005).

7.3.4 Religion

Religion played a role in the lives of most of the participants. Two participants saw it as their way to escape, experiencing warmth and caring. Most of the other participants concentrated on what they learnt through pain and how they lived through it in a relationship with God.

*Angelique made the important role that her relationship with God played in her life very clear with this example: "Ek kon met niemand, niemand praat nie. ...Ek dink dis maar net omdat ek gelowig is dat die Here my so baie gehelp het." (*Angelique, personal interview, June 20, 2005)

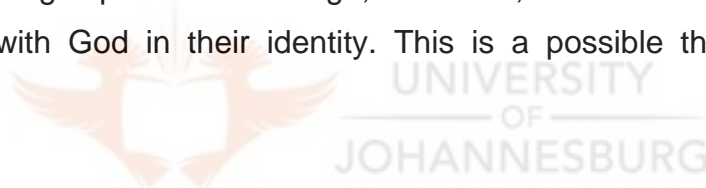
*Mary, who had a traumatic experience in prison, gave a testimony of the role that her relationship with God played in her life:

...Dit was [in die tronk] die slegste tyd van my lewe! Hulle is baie kerkmense [*sic*] in die tronk. Almal was vriende met almal. Ons het gewas in emmers en ons het rokke gedra. Die kos was baie sleg en die komberse wat hulle vir 'n mens gee steek jou vel baie seer. Ons het twee keer 'n dag geëet. Ons het vier ure geslaap. En dan maak jy die

vloere skoon. [She rubs over her face with her one hand.] Ek het *elke dag* gebed dat die Here my moet kom help. Daar was 'n vrou wat toe ingekom het. Sy vra my toe kan sy my help? Ken ek nie iemand se nommer nie? Ek het vreeslik begin te huil [*sic*] so bly was ek. Ek het toe net my huismoeder se nommer in my kop gehad, toe gee ek dit vir haar. (*Mary, personal interview, January 29, 2005)

*Kathryn had an interesting point of view where religion was concerned. She experienced herself as different from the other school leavers in the residence because of the pain of rejection she had already experienced in her life. She said: “En geloof... hulle is baie konserwatief. Ek is nou weer “open-minded” [*sic*]. Hulle het maklik geoordeel en dit het my ingesluit.” (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004)

It is worthy of note that *Peter did not mention anything about a relationship with God. *Angelique and *George, however, seemed to include their relationship with God in their identity. This is a possible theme for future research.



7.4 Findings: Single Experiences of the Participants in this Study

These experiences are visited to highlight the fact that most of the traumatic experiences of the state care leaver could be prevented in social context. It has already been mentioned in Chapter 3 that society has a considerable influence on the human development of late adolescents into young adulthood in the forming of their identity. Following this position in theory, the experiences of the state care leavers are given:

7.4.1 “Ek *Haat* Vakansies”: *Kathryn, Personal Interview, September 10, 2004

Wel, vakansies was vir my baie erg! Junie en Desember was erg, want dan moet jy uit die koshuis uit wees en al jou goed saamvat. Ek kon darem van my goed stoor in die koshuis. Die probleem met die vakansies is dat mens net so lank by iemand kan kuier voor hulle vir jou moeg raak. Ek *haat* vakansies! Ek het nog altyd. Mens moet by almal

uitkom en daarvoor het jy nou weer vervoer nodig. So het ek een aand by 'n nagklub beland waar 'n ou my dwelms in my drankie gegooi het, want hy was my vervoer wat my vriendin gereël het. Jis [*sic*], mense weet nie wat dit is om ander – selfs mense wat jy nie ken nie – in die oë te moet kyk om jou te help nie. Mens plaas eintlik jou eie lewe in gevaar.

...mens “worry” [*sic*] erg oor waar jy nou weer dié vakansie moet heen gaan en hoe jy daar gaan kom en hoe lank is die regte tyd om te bly voor jy eerder weer moet waai [*sic*]. Jy kan ook nie werk op 'n plek vir die vakansie nie, want sommige mense verwag van jou om bietjie sosiaal met hulle te wees en by ander kan jy nou weer nie te lank bly nie. Dis moeilik. Ek het al eenkeer twee nagte agtermekaar in 'n nagklub gekuier en dan in die dag in die toilette geslaap. Die derde nag wou ek selfmoord pleeg, want ek kon dit nie meer “handle” [*sic*] nie. Ek het nie geld gehad om by die kindershuis uit te kom nie, want in die lang vakansies gee die kindershuis nie vir jou geld vir kos nie. Toe kry ek gelukkig werk by die nagklub as kelnerin, maar toe los ek dit, want waar moes ek slaap. Toe het ek darem genoeg geld gehad om my een vriendin te bel om te vra of ek daar kan bly. Dit was nog net vir 'n week. My naweekouers was oorsee.

7.4.2 “Huiskomitee Behandel my Soos 'n Krimineel”: *Kathryn, Personal Interview, September 10, 2004

...die HK [*sic*] [house committee] het in my eerste jaar na die studentedekaan gegaan en gevra hoe hulle my moet hanteer... [From here on she speaks much louder and the feeling of the researcher is that she experiences anger. Her emotions are very clear on the subject.] Jissie [*sic*]! Wat is ek? 'n Hond of iets? Ek was woedend vir hulle! Hy was die hoogste vlak. Hoekom het hulle nie na die huisvader toe gegaan nie. Of eerder – hoekom het hulle my nie gevra nie! Dit sou beter gewees het. Ek voel verraai. Ek is 'n mens met gevoelens! Dis asof hulle gaan vra hoe om 'n krimineel in die koshuis te hanteer – so asof ek 'n probleem gaan veroorsaak. ...In hulle oë was ek die kindershuiskind en nie...die presteerder op skool en blah-blah [*sic*] wat nog alles nie. Nee, hulle verkies om 'n “label” [*sic*] om my nek te hang vir die universiteit se topbestuur om te sien! ...Die dekaan het toe gesê hulle moet my nes die ander

hanteer. “Wooooow [*sic*]! [She widens her eyes and waves her arms in the air to show exaggeration.] Big surprise! [*sic*] Ek sou hulle presies dieselfde kon vertel het.

7.4.3 “Kinderhuiskinders Mag nie Droom nie”: *Henry, Personal Interview, September 17, 2004

*Henry was tested and found to be extremely high quality “athletic material” (*Henry, personal interview, September 17, 2004). His dream is to compete in the Olympics. With this knowledge from *Henry’s world in the back of the reader’s mind, the next is his unique experience as an individual state care leaver:

Ag man, almal glo vas jy *moet* na skool gaan werk of “swot” [*sic*]. My droom is internasionale atletiek. Jy het nie tyd om jou droom te jaag nie, tensy jy iemand het wat jou kan help nie. Jy mag nie jou droom volg as jy ’n kinderhuiskind is nie, al het jy hoeveel talent. ...Byvoorbeeld oorsee gaan is uit vir ’n kinderhuiskind. Ek het bietjie navorsing gedoen daarvoor, as jy dit so kan noem, en daar is nie ’n manier wat jy so iets kan doen nie. Jy het net twee opsies in die lewe - werk of “swot” [*sic*]. Jy mag nie droom nie.

7.4.4 “Ek Pas Nêrens in nie”: *George, Personal Interview, September 29, 2004

It seems from the experience of the first and youngest black South African participant that he was really confused about his identity. His skin is black, but the culture of the other people with the same skin colour as his own, differs considerably from his culture he has learnt in the children’s home. It stops him from making new friends. In the experience of *George, the concept of the children’s home as a different subculture from bigger society came very much to the fore.

As can clearly be seen from the in this interview with *George, the experience of the black South African state care leavers being reared in a children’s home where “white South African” norms, rituals and standards are taught, caused

problems in their development. The trouble is in the problematic adaptation of this group of black South African state care leavers into bigger society. It was also clear from this interview, as well as the one with *Peter, that this matter had a considerable influence on the development of the late adolescent state care leavers' identity and their sense of self. This theme is repeated in the research done by Barn et al. (2005) as well as by Stein (2005).

*Peter's appraisal of his experience as problematic and not having the knowledge to cope with it, makes his experience of loneliness so much more extreme. His fear of the unknown is also evident in this excerpt.

Ek mis die kindershuis baie. My vriende. Ek ken nie die goed wat hierdie mense doen nie al is hulle vel se kleur dieselfde as myne. Ek is ander maniere geleer. Ek wonder watter maniere is die regte – myne wat ek geleer het of hulle se maniere. Ek wonder baie. Ek weet nie of ek pas nie. Hulle sê ek sal nooit 'n groot man wees nie, want ek weet nie van die berg af kom se dinge nie. Ek verstaan nie. Hulle doen dinge wat ek nie ken nie. Ek pas nie. Hulle maak soms dat ek nie verstaan hoe om te doen om te pas nie. Hulle praat ander goed. So dan sit ek maar alleen en dink ander dinge.

Ek is bang vir hier buite. Nie gewoon aan hier buite nie. Bang vir die mense. Jy's nie gewoon aan wat hulle doen nie. Ek het nie rêrig iemand met wie ek kan praat as ek my kop seer stamp met dinge wat ek verkeerd doen nie. Nie rêrig iemand vir wie ek kan vra dinge nie. Hulle vra. ...Maar jy voel te sleg om te sê... Net vir die huismoeder kan ek sê....as sy vra, want sy't my mooi opgepas. Maar sy weet ook nie van die berg se dinge af nie.

7.4.5 “My ma Steel my Geld vir die Toekoms”: *J.J., Personal Interview, September 29, 2004

*J.J. had a very traumatic experience when he has forced back into the environment he was supposed to be protected from initially by being placed in the children's home.

...(Ek) voel dat hulle [the social workers at the children's home] nie regverdig was

teenoor my nie. Ek het hulle gevra om my te help om werk te soek, toe sê hulle nee, hulle kan nie. [This incident happened after he had already studied for two years, but had to stop because he failed.]

Ek sit toe in die knyp, want my vakansiepa by wie ek gebly het terwyl ek werk gesoek het, trek toe *Durban toe. Ek voel die kinderhuis het my forseer dat ek na my ma toe moes teruggaan, want ek het niks geld nie en nie 'n blyplek nie. By my ma, wat 'n dwelmslaaf is, trek ek toe in. Ek moes net met haar oor die weg kom. Ek begin toe werk in 'n restaurant en spaar geld soos hel, want ek wil in rekenaars ingaan. Ek het elke skof gewerk. Ek het later blase op my voete gehad. Ek slaap so gelukkig omtrent net by my ma se plek. So spaar ek toe genoeg en koop 'n goeie rekenaar. In die nagte probeer ek toe 'n kursus met rekenaars loop, terwyl ek bedags werk. My ma sê na twee weke sy soek nie die ding in die huis nie. Sy hou nie van "computers" *[sic]* nie. Dis van die duiwel of so iets. Ek besluit toe ek sal die ding verkoop en die geld gebruik om Engeland toe te gaan om daar te gaan werk. Dis meer geld en ek is bereid om hard te werk. As ek terugkom, kan ek dan 'n rekenaarkursus loop en 'n ordentlike werk kry.

'n Dag na ek die rekenaar verkoop het, kom ek by die huis en die geld is weg, maar my ma is in 'n ander wêreld met dwelms wat die wêreld vol lê. Sy erken toe in haar toestand sy het die geld gevat, want ek moet "rent" *[sic]* betaal as ek daar wil bly. Sy het dit met ander woorde gesteel, want ek het haar R200 'n maand "rent" *[sic]* betaal. Dis wat sy die ander ou gevra het.

Ek was so kwaad dat ek uit die huis gestap het en dadelik by 'n vriend wat saam met my by die restaurant gewerk het, gaan blyplek soek het. As ek gebly het, sou ek haar seker aangerand het, want Engeland was my oplossing vir my probleme. Toe sit ek weer waar ek was 'n paar maande voor dit. En ek kan vir *niemand* sê hoe ek voel nie! Die donnerse *[sic]* maatskaplike werker, "sorry" *[sic]* [He lifts his hands up in the air as if to ask pardon for the word.], is ook so koud soos 'n vis. Ek kon ook nie eers vir haar bel om net met iemand te praat nie. My huismoeder was ook uit, want ek was mos nou nie haar "blue-eyed boy" *[sic]* nie. Wat gee sy nou om. So daar sit ek toe weer.

Verseker teleurstelling [wat hy ervaar het]! En jy weet, hulle het geweet my naweekouers is weg. Ek het haar gesê as ek niks kry nie, moet ek na my ma toe. Ek was baie opgewonde toe ek matriek uit is. Ek kon nie wag om te begin swot nie. Ek is sterk, so ek het nie baie vrese gehad vir wat voorlê nie. Dis wat die teleurstelling seker soveel meer maak.

*J.J.'s experiences of utter disgust and disappointment made it very hard for him to believe in the goodness of other people. His identity and expectations of himself in the children's home were that of going to make an absolute success of anything he is going to do. Twice forces from outside his control flaunted these attempts he made to stand on his own two feet. This caused a lot of anger in *J.J., which would obviously have a negative effect on his sense of self, as well as his development into intimate relationships with the opposite gender, and more specifically a negative influence on relationships with authoritative figures.

However, despite all the painful experiences in the above-mentioned single experiences, it seems in the case of most of the older participants, that after five years they have learnt to adapt and experience their development as much further than those of their peers once they do adapt. They attributed this mostly to learning through pain, although they also admitted counter-productive coping mechanisms when probed about it.

7.5 Findings: Summary

If one had to summarise the findings of the state care leaver's experience in short, one would say that the most important finding is ignorance of society, leading to the experienced stigmatisation of the state care leaver. Further, social support, knowledge about life skills, social skills and career knowledge seem to be important experiences, which influence the development of the state care leaver in contemporary social context. The trust issue is, if one looks at the experiences of these participants, also preventable by the behaviour of society towards these individuals. A simple solution to this

problem could be to reduce the ignorance in society about the experience of the state care leaver.

Regarding autonomy as a task in adolescence, the author would like to refer to the experiences of most of the participants of not having learnt to make decisions that influence their lives. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, Fischer et al. (1996, p. 34) argue that by involving the adolescent in the decision-making process, one "...acknowledges their developing individuality and autonomy."

As a result of the findings and insights from this study, it is possible to conclude that in the process of adapting into a new subculture, the psychological development of state care leavers is negatively influenced by their experiences in society.

Then again, the positive experiences related by the state care leavers in their interviews give one reason to feel that there is hope. The other positive element that comes forward from the findings of this study is the understanding of the state care leaver. The findings achieved a better understanding of the insights and meaning that the state care leavers gave to their experiences after leaving the children's home. This gives valuable information for the future. The literature study and its correlation to the findings also make it possible for future research to concentrate on a purposeful preventative programme to better assist the state care leaver in a healthy and easier transition from late adolescence into young adulthood. This would include their constructive adaptation into a new society.

7.6 Conclusion

Much of the findings echo international literature on the experience of the state care leaver. The most repeated of the findings were the following:

- Experiences of being discriminated against because of their background. Their feelings were mostly that of discontent and even anger about this,

since they had no control over it.

- Lies about their past. From both the current study as well as from the literature survey, it was clear that this behaviour was being used as a coping mechanism to prevent the discrimination they experienced as so painful and as degrading to their sense of self.
- Abrupt loss of social support. All the phenomenological experiences of the participants, as well as those experiences of state care leavers from previous phenomenological state care leavers echoed the trauma, anger and the disappointment they experienced from this. They expressed yearning for social support from normally adapted people in society, so they could learn without pain in order to be the best that they can be. This also correlates with experiences from the literature survey.
- Feelings of loneliness. These experiences were closely related to loss of social support, as well as being discriminated against. In some of the experiences, it was also associated with not being familiar with the social rules and skills of a society they experienced as new.
- Making friends. Although the literature study does not give actual information on the process of making new friends, it does, however, refer to Martin and Jackson's research (2002, p. 124) where some of the participants felt that they were "...standing out amongst their peers as different or peculiar". The participants also felt that they did not have the resources to mix with friends, including their clothing, transport, finances and more. Another aspect that also comes to the fore is that they experienced the need to tell lies about their background to be accepted by their peers when making friends. This fact was repeated earlier, but puts the emphasis again on the importance of society in the healthy development of the late adolescent.

Concerning the above-mentioned experiences, one of the theorists on human development (Riegel, 1976), not only acknowledges the individual and problems that could be caused by ignoring the state care leaver as an individual, with a lack of certain important social and independent-living skills (it should be defined as part of their state care leaver identities), but also

acknowledges the influence of cultural-sociological factors (different subculture and discrimination) on the development of the individual, biological and historical influences (his or her background) and outer-physical factors, for instance, the physical integration into a (unknown) society. Riegel's theory is one of the theories mentioned in this study, which makes the understanding of the experience of the state care leaver just a little more deeper and hopefully more convincing that society has a responsibility towards the state care leaver.

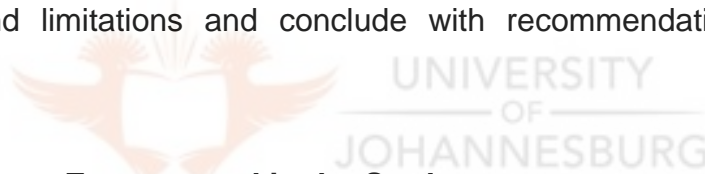


CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Overview of the Phenomenological Experience of the Late Adolescent State Care Leaver

Chapter 7 (p. 51) summarised the findings of this study. For this reason, this chapter will only concentrate on the recommendations to try look for solutions to the experience of the late adolescent state care leaver; problems encountered in the study (for instance the exclusion of interviewees) and problems encountered with the age of some of the participants. The chapter will also deal with ethical issues in the study, trustworthiness of the study, strengths and limitations and conclude with recommendations for future research.



8.2 Problems Encountered in the Study

In the pilot study, there was a serious problem concerning the biased availability of participants. The researcher tried in the current study to overcome this hurdle by including more state care leavers having no contact with the children's home and specifically previously incarcerated state care leavers. It was only successful to a certain degree, since the researcher experienced high levels of social desirability or otherwise experiences that were too traumatising or revealing to the identity of the state care leaver to be ethically viable.

A very serious problem that almost made the possibility to use the first black South African experience invalid, was fortunately coped with well, because of non-verbal communication that the researcher picked up at the beginning of the interview. The researcher requested that all the interviewees must have finished secondary school. Therefore the assumption was that they could read

and write. With the third participant, I asked, as with all the other participants, that he should tell me if he does not understand anything in the contract. He leafed the first page, containing the important information on the study and asked for the second page, which was easy reading, to be explained. I explained the whole contract in detail and made sure that he understood it. At the end of the interview, when the interviewer asked if there was anything that he felt we have left out about his experiences after leaving the children's home, he said yes, he would really like to learn to read and write, because he can only write his name.

And finally, also concerning the black South African participation, the researcher found it extremely difficult to find a black South African state care leaver who had left the children's home three to four years after finishing grade 12 and residing in the children's home for at least five years before leaving. The reason for this is that children's homes in South Africa only started taking in black South African children in 1995.

8.2.1 A Word on the Exclusion of Interviewees in the Study

In Chapter 5, a detailed description was given about the process of obtaining the participants. Those participants that have been used are omitted from the current subheading, since only the exclusions will be discussed here.

The first interviewee that had been incarcerated, was awaiting trial. The researcher found that the interview with him was based on social desirability, resulting in insufficient reflection on experiences. Even when the interviewer probed for deeper insight, the participant's answers were to let the participant look socially desirable with no true reflection. He was, for instance, asked how he experienced being in jail. He answered that he has not been convicted and just awaiting trial. Repeating the question about how he experienced being in jail, he said that he is making something positive out of it. When asked what the positive experiences were, he shrugged his shoulders saying "Ag, ek leer sommer net stuff [*sic*]". Asking him what the stuff is that he is learning, he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. The entire conversation went on like this,

resulting in no insight or reflection on the investigated experiences being verbalised by the interviewee and a total lack of co-operation. For this reason, the researcher decided to exclude this interviewee from the study.

Because of the one interviewee's traumatic experiences involving a woman while in care, the researcher experienced problems with a trusting relationship between herself and the second excluded interviewee. The interviewee experienced that the people who was supposed to protect her, had caused her her current problems – imprisoned on drug-related charges - and that she was now left alone to fend for herself. Later she did trust the researcher enough to make contact in order to talk, but she did not want to be identified. The information given (some of the information sub judice in a current court case), was of such a personal nature, that she would have been identified, and therefore the researcher made the decision to exclude her from the study.

The third excluded interviewee gave her full co-operation with the interview and gave some valuable information, although it was mostly repetitions of findings from previous experiences. She did, however, have a very traumatic experience and had information about something unlawful that was about to happen that could mean serious harm to others. The information could have identified her in such a way that her life could have been in danger. This placed the researcher in a position that jeopardised the confidentiality as put out in the contract. In the process of convincing and assisting her to report her traumatic experience and information to the police, the researcher and the participant came to an agreement that her information will not be used in the study. Her concern was that she would be identified by the people involved. The researcher's concern was also that the contract of informed consent did not include the possibility of the break of confidentiality in such a case.

She was referred for counselling with a social worker at Famsa, with whom she felt comfortable from a past experience. The follow-up telephone calls to her were very encouraging, in that she had learnt new skills to enable her to overcome her situation and develop into a lovely young lady. It was also very encouraging to her to know that her information saved the lives of several

people, since the police could take precautions in preventing the crime to happen.

The tenth interview (exclusion number 4) was unfortunately also not used because of the interviewees' physical incapability to express himself verbally (stuttering to a high degree) as well as high anxiety experienced by the interviewee at the time of the interview. A schoolteacher that still had contact with him referred the researcher to him. She heard about the research while the researcher was doing psychometric testing for children's home school leavers (for a future study on the phenomenon) at the school. Her concern was that he lost his work as a result of his background – coming from the children's home. It was, however, not the case, but rather his physical incapability to express himself verbally. He was referred to a social worker at Famsa, who could help him with his physical disability as well as help him with attaining a new job. The last follow-up call, which was just before the researcher had to hand in this research, was extremely encouraging. He was no longer stuttering and occupied a work that gave him much pride and joy.

8.2.2 Problems Encountered with Age in the Study

Initially, the aim was to select participants three to four years after leaving the children's home and finishing secondary school. The main concern was with ethical issues (legal written consent of participant), as well as richness of knowledge that can be attained from the participants' experiences. In the pilot study (Meyer, 2003), the researcher encountered a problem obtaining a black South African participant with the desired age for the study, since black South African children have only been taken in by children's homes since 1995. The participants should have resided in the children's homes for five years or more for the purpose of the study. The black South African participant in the pilot study was therefore much younger than the others. The researcher decided to include the participant, nevertheless, for the benefit of the black South African state care leaver experience, which outweighed the limitations. It also influenced the current study to give more attention to cross-cultural experiences in order to broaden the saturation of knowledge. A younger Black

South African participant was allowed again, but for this study two Black South African participants of 23 and 24 years old respectively were also included.

In the current study, a younger participant, the coloured South African girl, was used, also because the benefit of the saturation of knowledge far outweighed the limitations such as accumulation of experience, time to reflect, time to learn skills and time for social relationships to form and fail. Her experience represented the first of a group of children's home leavers that were part of a preparation programme for state care leavers. This programme concentrated on teaching the care leavers independent-living skills in order for them to be able to budget, write a curriculum vita, apply for a new occupation, and more.

8.3 Evaluation of the Study

8.3.1 Ethical Issues

The first and foremost of all ethical issues in psychological research, namely confidentiality, was covered by an oath of confidentiality taken by the researcher in the contract starting the interview. This contract is attached as an appendix for further insight.

One of the most crucial ethical issues the researcher had to deal with in this study was that of interviewees whose experience was too traumatising to be used. The other issue was experiences that would have compromised their anonymity in the research. This resulted in the researcher having had eleven interviews, but only using seven for the study. The detailed reasons for exclusion from the study are given elsewhere in this chapter (Chapter 8, 8.2).

Another ethical issue in phenomenological studies is the issue of trustworthiness emerging from transferability. This has already been covered in the discussion on rich description of raw data (Chapter 6).

A third issue is the concept of traumatisation, which could be caused by rich

description from the interviewee's traumatic experiences. The researcher left her telephone number with each interviewee to be contacted in case they felt traumatised after the interview. A follow-up call - to ensure that the participants did not need to discuss any trauma experienced - was made the day after the interview, and again one week and one month post-interview. Arrangements for therapeutic help were also made, should it have been necessary. It was used in some of the cases and discussed in this chapter under "...A Word on the Exclusion of Interviewees in the Study". It is interesting in this regard, that with the post-interview telephone calls, all the participants mentioned that they had experienced the interviews as very positive and in the most cases experienced the interviews as therapeutic.

Finally, to protect the identity of the participants, their names and other identifying information were altered or left out. Altered names of people and places are identified by an asterisk (*).

8.3.2 Trustworthiness



A phenomenological study does not have the same criteria for validity as that of a quantitative study. It is unlike a quantitative study, which looks at using the same description of data, rule out as much variables as possible and uses exactly the same wording as far as possible. In phenomenology, one would rather look at similar essential themes, whether one arrives at the same understanding of meaning given to an experience although the wording could be different. It has a direct influence on the trustworthiness of the study in terms of the confidence one would be able to place in its outcomes.

- As part of the trustworthiness of the study, a clear description of its aims, methods being employed, its purpose and the detail of the process of choice of participants, data collection and analysis were provided. Following this route, the reader is invited to scrutinise the content and this method also invites transparency of the entire process.

- On a more practical level, some situations endangered the trustworthiness of the study. The first was the availability of participants with a wide array of experiences. The easiest method for the researcher to attain participants was to contact children's homes. A problem was experienced concerning this, however, which was also mentioned by the state care leavers themselves: They choose not to tell the truth about their backgrounds in most circumstances. This practice made it difficult for the researcher to get into contact with state care leavers that did not have any contact with the children's homes they have resided in.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher tried to manage this by using the non-random snowballing method of obtaining participants, asking participants that the researcher has already interviewed – whether their interviews have been used or not.

Regarding this specific problem, it proved to be even more difficult to contact state care leavers that had been imprisoned. None of the heads of children's homes the researcher contacted had any contact with such state care leavers. They did, however, mention that such school leavers would rather choose to be disconnected from the children's homes once they have left or were imprisoned. The researcher found these participants by asking several parole officers for suitable participants for the study.

- In the interviews with the interviewees that were currently imprisoned, the researcher found it difficult to build a trusting relationship with the interviewees. The problem seemed to be a general lack of trust and social desirability in the interviews itself. These interviews were therefore excluded, as mentioned earlier in this chapter in more detail.
- The language that the research assignment was written in was different from the language of the interviews. Using Afrikaans when raw data

was used was an attempt at limiting language bias in the experiences of the state care leaver. One could translate it, but the chances of misinterpreting a meaning that the participant gives to his or her experiences, was not a risk that the researcher was willing to take. This would have limited the search for meaning and insight into the phenomenological experience of the individual, had a second language been used in the interviews.

- Finally, except for the excluded interviews mentioned earlier in this chapter, a further two participants were omitted from the study. The researcher knew them and felt that she could not succeed in listening to their experience without also thinking about the cause and psychological aspects involved in the knowledge being gained. This would have been a problem for the trustworthiness of the study.

8.3.3 Strengths and Limitations

Although the aim of this phenomenological study was not to generalise, the fairly high repetition of similar findings (including that of previous studies done) could in future permit the drawing of more general conclusions.

Although the design of the research does not lend itself to causal conclusions to be drawn, it does, however, lend itself to generate hypotheses for future research.

The analysis of interviews was, as expected, extremely time-consuming (Mouton, 2001; Smith, 1995). However, it was worth the effort to ensure a higher validity of the study, including higher saturation of knowledge and more insight being derived from the experiences of the state care leaver.

8.4 Recommendations to Deal With the Experience of the State Care Leaver

A programme to assist the school leavers should be implemented in each children's home. These programmes should deal with the issues that come forward from this study. This programme on its own would entail full-scale research before it could be implemented nationally. The following is information relevant to the recommendations that came forward from this study:

8.4.1 Professional career guidance: Schafer (1996) states that adolescents need to establish a social and occupational identity or they will remain confused by the roles they need to play as adults. The author's first recommendation for the state care leaver before leaving the children's home would be psychometric tests. The test battery should be done by a registered psychometrist, working together with the social workers, so that problem areas could immediately be attended to. These test batteries should at the least include two valid interest inventories, a personality questionnaire and an aptitude test combined with a scholastic attitude questionnaire. The results of the test batteries should be combined with biographical information, which would include their last school results, as well as the future state care leaver's choice of what he/she would like to do after school. It is important to take the emotional state of each testee into account at the time of testing (the psychometrist should be assisted by the social worker in this matter). It is also extremely important that the interest inventories are valid for the experience of lack of career knowledge as was clearly identified in this research. This also means that the testees must be warned beforehand that they should not answer the test with a preconception of what exactly they are going to do after school, since it makes the test result unusable and invalid. However, if the tests are conducted properly, this should not be a problem.

Furthermore, the researcher recommends that universities in the

vicinity of the different children's homes get involved by doing professional career guidance, giving all the relevant information. The internet could also be used more productively by social workers (ultimately making use of volunteers from the community to assist them) to give the school leaver more information on the details of different careers that are available, what qualifications are necessary to follow a specific career, what personality traits they would need for a typical occupation and more. A very good book is also available on a bi-annual basis that gives a lot of information on different careers in order to broaden the school leaver's scope of knowledge concerning the occupations that are available. The book is called *The Ultimate Career Guide* and should be available at any university's career guidance or client services centre.

To strengthen the importance of this recommendation, it is mentioned that Wade and Dixon (2006) emphasise the value of sound career planning in their outcome study in Great Britain (Britain has by far done the most research and made the most advances on the development of the state care leaver).

8.4.2 Exposure to different subcultures and skills training: It is recommended that black South African adolescents in children's homes get exposure to the different black subcultures in the country. This could be done by obtaining volunteers from the community, who will assist in skills training as well as providing social support. The social support should be from the year before leaving the children's home (including exposing the individual to different black South African subcultures), until at least four years after leaving the children's home. However, it is important that the volunteers are "trained" not to foster dependence, but rather facilitate independent living.

8.4.3 Multi-racial volunteers for skills training: The black South African state care leaver is specifically mentioned in the previous paragraph because of the findings in this study. However, it is also recommended

by the author that volunteers from the community get involved with both the independent-living skills training as well as the providing of social support to the state care leaver. The same subculture exposure as recommended for the black South African state care leaver, should be provided for the white, coloured and the Indian state care leavers.

8.4.4 Comprehensive volunteer training programme: It is further recommended that each children's home has a comprehensive volunteer training programme, including the preparation of families that volunteer to have children over weekends or holidays. It was found specifically in the study that the child in state care experienced the community families as positive while inside state care, but that the reality after leaving the children's home was not the same. This influences their expectations and identity negatively in the sense that they feel they cannot live up to the (unrealistic) standards that they perceived in the families.

8.4.5 Aftercare homes: It was recommended by a participant of the study that a "sort of a safe house" (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005) is kept in place, so that the state care leaver has somewhere to go in case they need someone to talk to or a place to stay for a month or two. Muller and Steyn (in Demont, 2002, p. 22) argue that "as long as there are children in residential care, instead of family care, and residential care does not adequately prepare the child for re-entry into the community, there is a need for a halfway house or aftercare homes".

8.4.6 Specifically trained staff for aftercare houses: If this is an option to be considered, the author would also like to recommend that these safe houses should be prepared to be involved in training, prevention, rehabilitation and helping the state care leaver to obtain a healthy social support system. The personnel should be able to teach independent-living skills; be able to help with rehabilitation in case a state care leaver had gone back into the problematic environment from

which he/she came and suffered as a result, and a programme to assist and empower the state care leaver to become an independent member of society.

8.4.7 Adaptation of disciplinary structures in children's homes: Another recommendation is that the disciplinary structures in children's homes are more individualised. The *honeymoon* (a term used in children's homes to describe the first period in which the child wants to put his or her best foot forward) phase in children's homes is an excellent period to get the child accustomed to the rules and regulations of the children's home environment. However, once one enters the developmental phase of adolescence, an individual needs to internalise these rules. The adolescent does this only by taking own responsibility within his or her own personality (which could be established with a personality questionnaire), being able to question the reasons for certain rules and why it is important to abide. The individual goes through life stages, which are often repeated in some way or another. One of these repetitions is attaining different steps of independence. It starts with the baby who needs to fall a few times in the process of learning to walk, or the small child that wanders off, but still comes to see if mother or father is still there. These simple examples are given to make it clear how important it is for the adolescent to make mistakes in the safe environment where he/she is still protected. This is true for every adolescent, but actually more so for the state care leaver who cannot afford to make any mistakes outside the children's home. As in an example from the study (*Kathryn, personal interview, September 10, 2004), the late adolescent state care leavers fear they cannot afford to enjoy student life in the same way as their peers. They cannot afford to fail one subject, change a subject or change a course or they will lose their bursaries - in the case of the trust mentioned by three participants. In the residence especially, where it is expected of the first year students to participate in every social event at the university, this places a lot of unnecessary stress on the state care leaver. Although this could also be applicable to the first year students in general, the

state care leaver has the added fears that they have absolutely no-one or nothing to fall back on (*Peter, personal interview, July 30, 2005). The state care leavers, therefore, should be able to have the confidence of own responsibility when they leave residential care.

8.4.8 Education of tertiary personnel as support system: In the experience of the author in the search for state care leavers at universities, it was found that neither the student dean nor the student services bureau/client services had any record of state care leavers at the different universities. In the process of explaining the study to obtain relevant participants, the researcher was amazed about the ignorance concerning the experience of the state care leaver. It is advised that the different universities and technical colleges get involved with children's homes in their vicinity. This could include the psychometric testing of school leavers, creating a social support system with relevant information and emotional support as well as assisting the school leavers in obtaining relevant skills for tertiary education. In Chapter 2 of this study, some more recommendations made by Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003) are provided.

8.4.9 Empowerment through skills training: There should be a programme that empowers the state care leaver with independent-living skills. A suggestion, coming from an unpublished assignment of Taryn Demont, a social work honours student in 2002, is presented here.

According to Demont (2002), the children's homes institutionalise children, "...which is one of the reasons why the children fail when reintegrated into the community. It is therefore vital that children are given the opportunity to be de-institutionalised." (Demont, 2002, p. 46) By this she means that they should be taught independent-living skills before leaving school and the children's home. She believes that the state care leaver should be empowered by programmes where they can learn skills such as:

1. Getting a job.
2. Getting tertiary education if viable.
3. Budgeting and saving and dealing with finances.
4. Building healthy relationships.
5. Learning their rights and responsibilities.
6. Learning to do time management and affording them the opportunity to implement it.
7. Setting of goals.
8. Managing personal issues.
9. Increasing self-esteem.
10. Preventing becoming involved in risky behaviours (HIV/Aids, unwanted pregnancies, substance abuse, criminal behaviour, sexually transmitted diseases, rape and abuse – especially inside a relationship).
11. Looking after oneself and one's home- (washing, cooking, ironing).
12. Getting a drivers licence.
13. Learning about healthcare and medical aid.
14. Reading a map book.
15. Looking for accommodation.
16. Opening a bank account.
17. Knowing various identification required (ID, driver's license, library card, birth certificate).
18. Choosing or knowing about transport options.
19. Knowing important numbers and how to use them in emergencies.

Demont (2002, p. 19) says that this would lead to a situation where “school leavers will know their responsibilities as individuals, and will take responsibility for their own lives and actions and will not expect things to happen, or other people to take responsibility for them”. Demont also recommends that a programme includes:

- Empowering school leavers to have a positive attitude towards themselves.

- Educating school leavers concerning tertiary education, including what they want to study and how long it will take. (The researcher would like to add here that psychometric testing for career guidance should be done in order to guide this process.)
- Educating school leavers in bridging the gap between school and tertiary education.
- Assisting school leavers in dealing with their personal problems through group therapy as well as individual therapy.
- Providing school leavers with the opportunity to learn the benefits of helping others and gain insight into life through exposure to volunteer work.
- Teaching school leavers independent personal living skills such as:
 - time management;
 - decision-making;
 - dealing with conflict;
 - personal hygiene;
 - how to live with others;
 - interpersonal skills;
 - how to balance work and leisure activities;
 - setting boundaries;
 - how to say no; and
 - assertiveness skills.

The researcher recommends that Demont's (2002) work be published and implemented in children's homes in South Africa to assist the school leaver when leaving state care.

8.4.10 Inclusion of a preventative programme for school leavers: The author would also like to recommend a preventative programme in children's homes (before the state care leaver leaves school) in terms of dealing with problems such as substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies and educating them about how to make the right partner choices in relationships. The last topic could partly be attained from

social psychology.

Stein (2005; 2006), who did research on resiliency and the state care leaver, links – in line with developmental theory – better developmental outcomes and coping with the above-mentioned problems, with a positive identity. He proposes that a positive identity is linked to:

- “the quality of care and attachments experienced by looked-after young people...”
- “their knowledge and understanding of their background and personal history”
- “their experience of how other people perceive and respond to them”
- “how they see themselves and the opportunities they have to influence and shape their own biography.” (Stein, 2005, p. 10)

He explains that getting the answer to the question “Who am I?”, would provide rationality and continuity to the state care leaver’s life and his or her identity.

8.4.11 Skills training house for school leavers in final year: According to McWhirter (in Demont, 2002), empowerment and skills training provide adolescents with the opportunity to obtain power over their personal environment, as well as assist them in coping better with their internal processes. Following this, the author recommends that children’s homes should consider a separate house from the other houses in the complex, where the school leavers are accommodated for the year before leaving the children’s home. The idea behind these separate houses would be to provide a sheltered environment in which state care leavers could equip themselves with practising the skills they learn in the programme. The rules in such a house would differ from those in the children’s home. The adolescents would have to learn to take personal responsibility for

decisions made. The school leavers themselves take the responsibility for running the house, including each having a week in which to budget and buy groceries for the house, each washing and ironing their own clothes, each having a turn to cook a meal for the household and to apply all the other skills that are learnt through the programme. Decisions should be made by the group in order for the adolescent to be in a position to understand the concept of the reasons for rules, the concept of co-operation, etc. This should be done under guidance of a social worker or the housemother. The young people should be engaged in consultation and decision-making about the rules in the house. A way forward should be suggested, which entails everybody collaborating – also to implement rules. This would teach them about social inclusion and participating in social goals and mechanisms, which are an essential part of the development of autonomy in late adolescence.

8.4.12 Career exposure during holidays: Another recommendation is that the care leavers are exposed to holiday work after psychometric tests have determined their interested areas of occupation. This could be done in the interim until the complete programme is implemented concerning career knowledge. This would give the state care leaver the opportunity to experience the outside world in an environment where he/she can come back and discuss problems and experiences in a group consisting of school leavers.

8.4.13 Conclusion (from previous literature): With the recommendations and experiences of the South African state care leavers in mind, it becomes important to not only look at better policy or programmes around the state care leaver, but also at the psychological aspects worked into the programmes or schemes. Britain, which did the most research and had the most success with positive adult outcomes of the state care leaver so far, had as its main aim in The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, introduced in October 2001 to:

“...delay young people’s transition from care until they are prepared and ready to leave, strengthen the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care; provide better personal support for young people after care; and improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.” (Stein, 2005, p. 25). Specifically in the South African experience, the state care leavers yearned for someone to keep in touch with them; someone to turn to for support, whether it be financial, accommodation or even just to ask questions.

Stein (2005) clarifies that improving services and levels of resources for adolescents leaving care, for example, housing, financial and personal support, is important in promoting their resilience, but “...what is important as well as the quantity is the quality of resource relationships. The principal finding from the only study to explore this dimension, carried out during the 1980s, was that young people who had successful transitions out of care not only displayed a higher level of total resource relationship but also had a lot more interactive relationships. They were, for example, able to negotiate decent housing, derive meaningful employment or work, participate in community and leisure activities, and engage in education. This study found that these young people’s social networks became richer and more amenable to expansion or contraction at will, and their personal states became more relaxed, stable and fulfilled. They were less lonely and isolated.”

Therefore, the author of this study encourages the development of programmes to assist the development of the state care leaver from adolescence into young adulthood - with all its responsibilities and expectations they do not understand before leaving care.

8.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The author hopes that further research would flow as a result of this study. The researcher would like to provide a few research ideas following the current study:

- This is an exciting field of research that is open for the peoples of South Africa, and keeping in mind the growing numbers of Aids orphans in the country, it is fast becoming an extremely contemporary issue. The ideal would rather be to design a programme as a preventative intervention.
- Perhaps a more detailed study into a combination of Riegel's developmental paradigm and acculturation could be done, since the experience of acculturation and its influence on human development has been identified in this study.
- Different perspectives in studying the experience of the state care leaver are necessary. Looking from a developmental perspective is more holistic and rather wide. One could perhaps also look at pathology.
- Since a phenomenological study does not look at causal factors, the researcher finds it extremely important to look at such a possibility of further research should one want to look at solutions for the problem. This could flow easily from a phenomenological study.
- And finally, the most challenging, as well as the most contemporary, would be the specific experience of the black South African state care leaver making the transition into the black South African culture of collectivism. A related option could be to look at this experience from a specific acculturative point of view.

Conclusion of the Study

As mentioned in the previous chapter, much of the findings echo international literature on the experience of the state care leaver.

It was surprising that some new findings were made, which the researcher has not seen in other literature on the state care leaver's experience to date, though it is highly unlikely that it has gone unseen in practice. To summarise, these were the lack of career knowledge and exposure to careers, lack of life skills and the experience of different social rules. Especially important was the mention of almost each participant of experiences relating to collectivism *versus* individualism. Although they did not mention the terms, the description of their experiences correlated with the description of these terms in literature.

The pattern of adapting after more or less three years, which was found with two participants in this study (*Kathryn and *Peter), was important, but would have to be repeated in further research to be able to generalise. Time might not be the variable here, but rather individual coping mechanisms or personality styles. It would be interesting to investigate such a hypothesis in quantitative research later, using psychometric testing.

The researcher is also not aware of a specific experience of a black state care leaver in previous literature done on the subject. There is, however, literature about black adolescents leaving foster care, looking at the culture differences when such a child grew up in a white cultural household. The incidence of developmental and emotional problems experienced by the black South African state care leavers - brought up in a white culture with no exposure to their own culture – was mentioned by two participants in the study. Their experiences were of not fitting into their own culture (black South African culture) outside the children's home. One participant especially experienced problems concerning the cultural uses in development, marriage and the role and importance of family in the black South African culture.

Hopefully, this study will be seen as a valuable contribution in seeking to

understand and find solutions and preventative measures for societal issues affecting the development of the people of South Africa. And, hopefully, this will help the people working with state care leavers to understand them and their traumatic experiences better. Ultimately, the hope is that this research would lead to an improvement of the psychological human development of state care leavers, and subsequently assist them to better adapt into society as healthy, productive adults.



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APPENDIX

WRITTEN CONTRACT FOR INTERVIEW



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Dear(first name and surname)

I thank you very much for your participation in my research concerning the late adolescent leaving the children's home after finishing 12th grade.

This is a very important research in that it is the first of its kind in South Africa and we welcome you as being a very important part of it. You will be helping us to change lives!

The reason for this study is to find out what your experiences were after leaving the children's home in as much detail and with as much examples as possible, keeping in mind that you can remain anonymous if you choose to do so.

We would like to set up a programme later with your information to help those leaving children's homes in future – in order to make moving into the community easier. If you have experienced any problems, mentioning it could help to prevent it happening in the lives of the future care leavers. If you have experienced any strengths and positive experiences or can mention things you feel you have learnt in the process, it would also help us to know what to work into the programme in future.

This study will be a phenomenological study, meaning basically that you are as important in this research as the writer. It also means that your experiences will help many people in future to do research to make the lives easier for young adults leaving the children's home. You are the one leading us into your life and experiences, so that we can learn from your fears, your happiness and your pain.

It is a big step to make when you open up your life to someone else and not always so easy. For this reason, it is very important that you feel safe that

your private details are protected. You are also allowed to stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable. It is your right and my ethical duty as a researcher in psychology to respect your privacy. For this reason, I have set up a contract by which I must keep and will keep.

I will also leave my telephone number with you, so you can phone me at any time if you need to talk after the interview if you feel uncomfortable, unhappy or depressed afterwards because you remembered things that hurt. I promise hereby to help you if you should feel like this. I will also take your details only to use to contact you if (1) I do not understand something you have said when I am writing it down and (2) to make sure afterwards that you are OK. I do this for ethical reasons and because I care and do not want to hurt you through this research. Besides, you must remember right through this interview that you are in control and do not have to say anything that you do not want to. I must and will respect that at all times. I need you to understand this before you sign for permission and before we start talking.

The Contract:

My Part:

I hereby promise that your private details in this contract will only be available to me, Ida Meyer, as well as my study leader, Prof W.J. Schoeman at the University of Johannesburg. Your private details will be destroyed after I have presented it for my examination marks and will only be used by myself in interaction with you.

I also promise to respect your privacy at all times and to respect your right to stop the interview at any time should you wish to do so for any personal reasons not necessarily known to me.

.....

Signature of author: Ida Meyer

Your Part:

1. I,..... hereby give my written permission that my knowledge of my experience may be used in a Master of arts in psychology research on the experience of late adolescents leaving the children's home. I participate with full knowledge of my rights as mentioned above.

2. Please circle the answer that you choose:

I give permission that an audiotape can be used in our conversation.

Yes

No

3. Please circle the answer that you choose:

I want my identity to be kept private at all times.

Yes

No

4. Please circle the answer that you choose:

I would please like to go through the final product to make sure that I am not identified in it. If I feel uncomfortable with the information in the sense that I feel I can be identified, I have the right to ask for it to be changed insofar as to protect my identity.

Yes

No

.....

Signature of participant: